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"CHATTING GAILY, SHE TRIMMED THE CLIMBING ROSES."

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Author's Definitive Edition

FAR IN THE FOREST

A Story

BY

S. WEIR MITCHELL, M.D.
LL.D. HARVARD AND EDINBURGH

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INTRODUCTION.

VERY many years before the great war, the forest counties of Northern Pennsylvania which border on New York and are watered by the Alleghany, Sinnemahoning, and Clarion were vast forest-lands, little disturbed as yet by the axe or the plough. Roads were few and bad. Railways were unknown. Here and there a primitive mill, driven by water-power, sawed out the planks needed for a scant and widely-scattered population. In the winter lumbering-parties were busy near the greater streams, and in the spring a few rafts found their way down to the Ohio or on the other side of the "divide" to the Susquehanna.

Along the rivers, at rare intervals, a log cabin, and, still farther apart, a group of houses known as a town, made up, with the lumber-camps, all that there was of human habitation. The lands had been taken up years before the date of my tale, by a few settlers, chiefly from New England or Eastern Pennsylvania, in the hope that the wealth of coal beneath the soil would one day enrich them, when the iron roads should give access to the lake. Among these pioneers were some

vigorous, enterprising men, but for the most part they were waifs and strays whom civilization had disappointed. A few who came into the woods together were Swedenborgians. These mysterious woodlands suited them. Regarded by their neighbors as strange beings, they lived on, patiently waiting for the better earthly good which did not come. The majority had no religion, or what they had had faded away in the absence of churches, and their schoolless children grew up strong as young pines in that untainted air. In these deep woods, untroubled by courts of justice, a more dangerous and smaller class found a sanctuary into which no avenging law pursued their steps. With lessened temptations and sufficient work, fish in the streams, and game in the woods, life was adventurous enough to suit their tastes, and not too difficult. Hence, serious crime was rare, and these rough exiles from the cities were less troublesome than in more conventional communities. For grave offences the law of the woods was swift enough, and sometimes even too thoughtlessly swift, in its vengeance. On the whole, the tone of this widely-scattered and sparse population was right-minded and just. A certain manliness was the common gift. Caste was unknown. Physical strength and skill with axe or rifle were valued as they must needs be in such a life. Newspapers were rarely seen, and politics troubled no man.

Three years before the date of my story, Elizabeth Preston had found her way with her husband into the wilderness. A great stress was upon

her. In body and mind she was for the time worn out. When but seventeen she had married, and, as was thought, married well. Her husband was rich. They had all that men desire. A few years in our growing land would bring their acres near New York and about Albany to such values as would make them feel at ease concerning the remote future.

Paul Preston was a man who was joyous and companionable because fate had never given him cause to be otherwise, and had the restless vivacity of slightly-constructed character. Men of this type resemble in a measure certain immature feminine natures, and have a like attractiveness. But the easily pleased possess the seeds of danger in their facile temperaments. Pain in all its forms is as near as pleasure, and far more potent to influence. The terrible intimacy of marriage soon taught his young wife some sharp lessons. She saw as others had seen that he was always too near unhappiness, and soon learned that he would go to any length to escape annoyance or avoid discomfort. This temperament simply dooms a man if by mischance pain becomes for any length of time a fact with which he has to deal. No man who has not fought this demon knows how many other devils he brings with him into the house of torment. From them Paul Preston shrunk morally disabled. A brief but painful malady taught him how easy it is to escape from pain by the aid of sedatives. For such men there is no to-morrow. Renewed attacks of disease served to fasten on him the habit which of all

evil habits is most easily made and most hard to break,—the constant resort to opium. Once created, it found in Paul Preston's nature that which made it impossible to escape even when the awful bribe of pain was gone.

Against this foe of heart and head,—for to both it is fatal,—Elizabeth Preston fought the losing fight which a resolute and high-minded young woman wages in the interest of a weak masculine nature. It were vain to dwell on a tale so common. His property disappeared almost mysteriously. Trusts in his keeping became embarrassed and were taken from him. At last she knew with amazement what it was to want. Next she learned how surely all morals wilt in the presence of the habit he had acquired. He became at last a passive, inert being, and she the controlling force. Resolute to make one last effort at reform, she induced him, with a certain ease which amazed her, to spend a summer on a great tract of land in Northern Pennsylvania, which was almost the last unembarrassed possession left to her. Once in the woods, the autumn found them with so little means that to stay was easier than to leave, and so the years had run along and by degrees she had settled down to make the best of a bad business. She thought, and rightly, that in the wilderness he would be unable to secure easily the needed drugs; but she failed to calculate on the other foe which is apt to become the craving of the disappointed opium-eater. Whiskey was only too plenty about the logging-camps. To this he took kindly and fatally, and, enfeebled

by sedatives and repeated disease, fell an easy prey.

She found their first summer in the woods not altogether unpleasant. There were at least no social pretences to sustain, no heedless questions to answer, and life was altogether gratefully unconventional. But, as time went on, new and unlooked-for difficulties arose and troubled the overweighted woman. In his native city, Paul Preston had had more or less amusement and occupation; but in the woods he had none, and this was a matter the thoughtful young wife had failed to anticipate. He cared nothing for the manly sports the land offered, and spent his time lounging about in the lumber-camps with a low class of men, leaving to his wife the burden of looking after their ruined affairs and of making such provision for their comfort as was possible. By degrees she became accustomed to take the place of both, and to direct the men employed to build their cabin and clear their fields. As to her husband, she learned each week a new lesson of despair, as things went from bad to worse. At last, by degrees, he took to his bed, a feeble, selfish invalid. Doctors there were none, and, had there been any, they would have been useless to Paul.

When laid up in bed and wanting his accustomed stimulus, a very mild bribe procured it, and Mrs. Preston found it vain to remonstrate with the silent woman whom lack of enterprise alone induced to remain with them. She had come for a week, and had never had the energy to do more than merely

talk of leaving, when reproached by her mistress for her willingness to supply the vicious wants of the husband. At last he ceased abruptly to care for his habitual stimulus, a fatal signal of decline. Elizabeth Preston saw but too clearly how near was the end.

FAR IN THE FOREST.

CHAPTER I.

THE snows of a grim February evening were falling in the fine flakes which predict a long storm. On the broad acres of a clearing above the Alleghany River they lay thick already upon the deep accumulations of a severe winter. Here and there the furious wind had blown away the drifting masses and set, black against the whiteness, sharp outlines of burned or mouldered stumps. Beyond the snake fence on either side, but thinner towards the river, stood dense forests of pine, cherry, beech, and birch, weighted with cumbering masses of snow which fell at times as the wind roared through the shaken trees.

A well-built and unusually ample log cabin stood in the centre of the clearing. On one side the drifts sloped up to the eaves and lay piled in loose, ever-shifting heaps under the shed which crossed the front of the house above the door-way. Save for a little smoke blown straight away from two chimneys of stone, and a dim light from one window, the scene was comfortless and devoid of signs of life. Presently the door opened, and a tall woman came out and, trampling down the snow, stood and looked across the lonely clearing. She drew long

breaths of the sharp, dry, exhilarating air. Then she walked to the end of the porch where the drifts were least heavy, and, leaning against a pillar, stood motionless, as if too deep in thought to feel the intense cold. In a few minutes a small rotund person partly opened the door and put out her head.

"He's waked up now," she said. "Best come in. It's powerful chilly."

"I will be there in a minute," returned the woman. "This outside air is such a help, and I am so tired, Becky."

"It won't rest you none to git yer ears frost-bit, and I'm that wore out with keepin' awake, I've just got to lie down if I'm to keep on spellin' you."

"I will come," said Mrs. Preston. "Is he any easier?"

"No, ma'am; he's a-rollin' over and groanin'. Now he's a-callin'."

Mrs. Preston went in.

The storm outside had gone from bad to worse. The snow sifted through the chinks under door and window, and without, the wind howled, scurrying around the lonely cabin.

Sadly watching her husband's uneasy sleep, she sat late into the night, at times thinking of the remorseless past, at times rising to warm herself at the fire, where Becky was snoring, her chin on her breast. Of a sudden Mrs. Preston turned. Was it a sound of human life she heard? It seemed unlikely.

The rare ox-roads were lost to view, and travel was next to impossible except on snow-shoes, while

within the cabin death was drawing near with swift and certain steps. Suddenly she roused herself.

"What's that, Becky? Becky!" The woman looked up. "I heard some one knock. Listen," added the tired wife.

"Oh, it ain't nobody."

Both sat down again, but in a few minutes Bessy Preston, as she had been called in her happier days, arose and took a candle, saying, "Keep awake till I come back. It must be some one. I heard it again. There! There! Some one called."

"Well, you won't be easy till you see," said the abrupt Becky.

Mrs. Preston left the room, hearing as she went the loud breathing of the failing man. Crossing the larger apartment, she glanced at her boy, asleep on a mattress in the corner. The wind found entry at a dozen half-closed chinks and under the door, flaring her candle as she guarded it with her hand. She set it down on the table, and opened the door with difficulty. The wild wind rushing in sent the snow over her in clouds, and put out the light, as a heavy form seated propped against the door fell inward across the threshold. Seeing dimly by the blown light of the huge logs flaring on the hearth that it was a man, she bent over and tried to drag him into the room. Unable to succeed, she called Becky, and together they drew him before the fire. As the great logs cast their blaze on his face, the women saw glazed eyes, a long yellow moustache, purple lips, a face unlike any they knew, haggard with the set look of swiftly-coming death.

"Quick, Becky! Bring a bucket of snow." Bessy loosened his necktie, and cast off a fur cloak from his shoulders, then pulled off his gloves, and, with help from Becky, his long gaiter moccasins, observing that around one of them were the deer thongs of the snow-shoes which he had apparently lost in the drifts. Then they rubbed his hands and feet with snow, and at last got down his throat an ample dose of whiskey. At intervals he drew a long breath, and, half an hour later, suddenly opened, shut, and reopened his eyes, and began to breathe steadily. At last he spoke.

"Wo bin ich?"

"What's that?" said Becky.

"He is a German. There," leaning over him, "you are safe."

"Ach! Ich bin im Himmel."

"Can you speak English?"

"Ach, why not? Where am I? I cannot see yet."

"You are safe. I am Mrs. Preston. You are in my house."

"Thank you. Ah, how comfortable it is!"

"It might be that Ryverus. I heerd tell of him," said Becky.

"Hush! I suppose so," said the mistress. They continued to aid him, and at last he was able to rise, take off his coat, and sit up in a chair. His face was still haggard, his limbs tremulous.

"You are Mrs. Preston," he said, after a little. "I am John Riverius. I started to go over from one logging-camp to another, and lost first my way and then my snow-shoes, and now but for you my

life had gone too. How can I thank you, madam?" Unmistakably he was a gentleman, and the words of one of her own class, to which she had long been unused, affected her strangely.

"Keep thanks for to-morrow, Mr. Riverius." ("What a curious name!" she thought.) "Becky will get you some supper. A shake-down in front of the fire is the best I can offer. And now, good-night. I must go to my husband. He is very ill. Good-night."

He stood up with some little difficulty, took her hand, and, bending over, touched it with his lips. "My lands!" said Becky, with the undisguised critical freedom of the woods. The German turned on her a slight look which made her uncomfortable for a moment, she hardly knew why. Then he smiled, as if remembering his near peril and the womanly help both had given. The look of haughty impatience passed like a shadowing cloud.

"Ach, madam, if I am forbid to say my thanks, I shall at least be grateful in my dreams."

"Certainly it is out of my power to prevent that," Mrs. Preston answered, smiling. Then she passed into the adjoining room, whence came through the chinky partition the sound of long hoarse respirations and at times the suppressed tones of the watcher.

Bessy had been very weary an hour before, but now the sudden fresh call upon her energies, the enlivenment of pity, fearful expectation, sense of power to rescue, had strangely tuned anew the relaxed energies to possibility of healthy responses.

Had the aided man been of the rough woodsmen she knew so well, the task would have been as gladly and as perfectly done, but there would have been lacking the little flavor of interested curiosity as to the person helped. His was a type quite new to her, but there are mysterious shibboleths by which well-bred women assign men to their true social place. A man of Bessy Preston's class would have tardily reached her conclusion—in a day or two.

She sat down by Paul Preston's bedside, saw him sleep again, and, musing, went over anew the scene in which she had taken part. Suppose she had not heard. A half-hour more, and rescue would have been impossible. She shuddered. It had been a really great effort to get up and go to the door. Months of sad exertion, days of tears, entreaties, nights of watching, had brought her to the danger-verge of serious physical exhaustion. Years of vain unrewarded struggle had subdued her. A half-hour's sudden success had sent through her an arousing sense of competence and renewed her faith in effort. For the time it left her very happy. To give always made her joyful, and she had, too, the royal and more rare capacity to receive with dignity. She was herself aware that she was by nature proud,—too reserved, she had always said,—would have liked, she suspected, to be even haughty had her gentler part permitted the luxury of such indulgence. It may have been so, but an immense appetite for loving had ever perplexed her reserve. An eager helpfulness was part of her

nature. Where she loved, and when she gave or aided, a certain pleasant simplicity made it appear graciously natural to those on whom her bounty of heart or her more material givings chanced to fall. She had the child's unspeculative generosity. The man outlives the boy. The girl is apt to survive as an essential part of the best womanly life.

As Bessy Preston sat with a little innocent feeling of romance in her mind as to the incident which had just excited her, John Riverius was devouring his bacon and hard-tack with the voracity of a wolf. Meanwhile, Becky, having provided for his wants, deliberately seated herself and watched him with curiosity. She treated Mrs. Preston with a fair share of consideration, but for no one else had she the slightest regard, and she was simply a sturdy, domestic animal, who recognized but one mistress, and did her duty somewhat inefficiently.

"Is the Herr Preston very ill?" said Riverius.

"Who?" said Becky.

"Oh! Mr. Preston."

"Him!" returned Becky, pointing to the sick man's room. "Paul Preston. Yes, he's took bad this time. He won't be no loss, neither." Becky saw no cause for reticence.

Despite his knowledge of the utter frankness of the woods, Riverius had a slight sense of amused amazement. Then he reflected a moment, and said, softly,—

"Is he going to die?"

"He won't if he can help it; but he is. There ain't much of him left to die with."

The oddity of the phrase struck the German. "What does the doctor say?"

"Doctor! He ain't got none. He's just a-dyin'."

"Do you mean that you two women are alone here with a dying man and with no other help?"

"There's little Paul, and he ain't no good yet. He's too small. Phil Richmond was here three days back, and Myry she'd come too, if the snow'd git harder. I'm goin' myself then. It's too much work, and they say help's wanted bad down river, Pittsburg way."

"Ach," said the German, rising to warm his stiff back at the fire. "I haven't thanked you yet, Becky."

"Oh, it weren't no trouble. I'd 'most as lief rub your legs as split wood."

He laughed quietly. "Look here, Becky," and he cast a bright gold eagle in her lap, "you must not go away. Once a week I shall give you a thing like that, for a month, we will say, and after that we can talk again."

Becky looked at the coin, turned it over, tied it up in the corner of an unwholesome-looking yellow silk handkerchief, and put it in the sanctuary of her bosom. "I'll bide a bit," she said, and made no further comment on the matter. "Got all you was wantin'? I'm to spell her till mornin'," she added, pointing to the bedroom, and, so saying, disappeared by the door which opened into the sick man's chamber.

A moment later she came back, and, putting only her round head through the door, said succinctly,—

"She says you ken smoke here if you've a mind to, or in the kitchen; 'tain't no difference."

He rose at the words, as if to the personal presence of the woman whose message he received.

"Mrs. Preston is very good,—very thoughtful. How thinks she of others thus much in her own trouble! I will, with her good permission, smoke in the kitchen."

"Don't you upset the clothes-horse. Ther's things a-dryin'."

"I shall be careful."

The head disappeared, and the door was closed with needless noise. Looking about him with a queer sense of puzzle, he took in the interior,—the birch-barked wall, warm in ruddy brown colors, the two silver candlesticks on the mantel. He picked up one, and, caught by a mark below the crest, brought out a loupe from his pocket and examined it with the interest of a connoisseur. "The Dutch Lion and the arms of Leyden. About 1700, one would say." And he set it down with a certain tenderness. Then he noticed a print by Raphael Morghen, and, candle in hand, glanced at it a moment, muttering, "Waste of a good engraver on a poor picture at best." Next he looked over the small row of books, and, choosing one, took it with him into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. Undoubtedly there did appear to be clothes-horses and innumerable garments on chair-backs and pegs, so that a peculiar dampness pervaded the air, which was at a tropic temperature owing to a big fire recently renewed. Seeing no chair unoccupied by

some fashion of clothing, he sat down on the floor, with his back against a pile of logs, and carefully filled an ample meerschaum which he handled with lover-like care. He was immensely, deliciously comfortable.

"Himmel!" he said to himself, "just as one gets used to doing without luxury and life gets simple and wants grow less, one is set face to face with an unanswerable problem. And what can one do? Much obliged to you, madam, and go away. Becky is such a simple creditor. She can be paid. Why does a man hate an obligation? And I, of all men? I, Johann Riverius, I go. I am lost to her life, and there, eternally, is this debt carrying the interest of every agreeable thing I shall ever do or see or hear in the next fifty years, if I live as long as my fathers." He disliked obligations,—why, he would have found it hard to say. Long training in self-reliance had bred a sturdy trust in his own competence to deal with whatever might turn up. He would have hated to think that he undervalued human help because its need implied in him some lack of prudence, forethought, or force.

Yet this was vaguely in his mind just now. "I might have known the risk," he thought. Then he figured to himself death, and two weak women struggling for victory, the field of contest his weak inert body. There was for Riverius a sense of humiliation in the matter. He faintly recalled his desire to resist as he had realized the idea that they were rubbing his feet and hands. At last he emptied the ashes from his pipe and stood up, a

tall, soldierly-looking man of some thirty-two years. "What can an honest man give for a life?" he reflected. "What would it fetch, and in what coin be paid for? Good constitution, slightly damaged by cold. Ach!" and he laughed outright, "I would bid it in pretty high." Then he opened the door, saw the shake-down on the floor, and, without undressing, put his head on his folded fur coat, now dry, and was soon happily out of reach of the problem which his pipe had failed to help him solve.

CHAPTER II.

Riverius rose early next day, went out and drew water from the well, and found in the drift at the door his knapsack, and, so aided, made his brief toilet. The storm was over, the sun out, the air sharp and cold. Everywhere the drifts were deep, and travel, even with snow-shoes, was difficult, and without them out of the question.

Mrs. Preston met him as he came in. She looked worn and pallid from her night-watch. "Good-morning. I hope you feel no ill effects from your freeze. One has to be careful in these woods."

"I am very well," he answered, "and so used to the country that I ought to be ashamed of the trouble I caused."

"It was no great trouble. I really was the better for it. The necessity for sudden physical exertion sometimes helps one. You must make yourself as comfortable as you can until the crust gets hard or we can find you snow-shoes."

"I am afraid that you are right. Ah! is this your boy?" he added, as a lad of nine entered from the back door.

"Come here, Paul," she said. "This is Mr. Riverius, a gentleman who will be with us a day or two. You must take care of him. I cannot leave your father long alone." Riverius liked it that she gave no explanation of how he had come.

The boy came forward frankly and welcomed the stranger with a queer, boyish sense of being the host. In a few minutes they were talking of the drifts, and the German was describing to Paul a glacier, and chamois-hunting. Mrs. Preston stood for a little while and listened, but presently was summoned by Becky and went back to her husband. Then the German said, "Has your father been long ill?"

"Yes, sir, a good while. Mother says he is very sick, and Becky says he is going to die. Do you think he will die?"

Riverius glanced at him with fresh interest. He was tall and neatly built, with promise of strength, and had the cloud-blue eyes of the mother.

"I do not know, my lad. What is it that he has? What sickness?"

Paul knew but too well. He colored. "Mother knows. I don't rightly understand, sir."

"Ah!" exclaimed Riverius, quickly. "I can ask her. Perhaps I may be of some use."

"Shall I call her?"

"No,—oh, no. Presently I will talk to her."

"Here is breakfast."

The German stopped his hostess as she passed through the room an hour later. "Pardon me," he said, "but I have travelled much, and know a little medicine. Let me see your husband."

"Ah, if you would!" she said, eagerly. "Come in; come in. He won't know. He is worse." He followed her and stood by the bed, took the cold hand, felt the colder feet, and looked up, drawing

back a pace from the bed. She glanced at him inquiringly. He shook his head slowly. She understood.

"Is he dying?"

"It will not be long. He suffers not now."

At intervals Paul Preston ceased to breathe, then drew a deep draught of air, and then a less and a lesser, with regardless eyes staring up at the log rafters. By and by he moved uneasily, revived a little, and put forth a hand, which fell on that of Riverius resting on the bedside. The dying man shut his damp fingers on it, muttering words which Riverius could not understand. Both of the lookers-on saw the mistake, but neither stirred. "Ah," said Bessy, catching the meaning of the broken phrases. The words called back to the woman her young life, its gradual extinction of joy, of energy, and at last of hope. Then she turned to the bed and stood with one palm on the moist brow, and, as if forgetful of any other presence, said aloud, "Thank God, I never failed! Oh, Paul, Paul, did you ever know——"

The German drew away quietly and walked to the fireplace. In a few moments she crossed the room to him.

"I think he must be dead. Will you see?" He had been dead to her long before. There are such living corpses in many homes. She sat down and stared dully into the fire, while the chance-comer stood by the bed and was about to close the set eyes. Suddenly she was beside him.

"Oh, no, no! I! I! No one else!" And tremu-

lously but resolutely she did for the dead the little needful office.

Riverius went out. In the kitchen he met Becky. "He is gone," he said.

The next day the drifts were firmer, and a man from a cabin across the river was sent off for help, and two or three woodsmen came in from a lumber-camp. Later in the morning, as Riverius stood at the door in the sun with Paul, he saw crossing the clearing a tall man and a large, fair woman, both on snow-shoes.

"Who is that?" said the German.

"Oh, that's Philetus Richmond; he's blind. Sometimes he works here. Miriam's with him. She's his wife. They live down the river a bit, a good bit back.—Where's Phely?" he said to the woman, as they came nearer.

"I left Ophelia at Mr. Rollins's camp with Mrs. Rollins. How is your mother, Paul?"

"Better, to-day. Go in, please. This is Mr. Riverius, Myry.—Philetus, this is Mr. Riverius."

"I did not know you in your muffles," said the German. "We have met before."

In a day or two Paul Preston was laid at rest among the pines a few hundred yards back of the house, and those he left behind him set about by degrees to readjust their lives as seemed possible or best. Meanwhile, Riverius had induced Philetus to take him in as a boarder, much to the satisfaction of his wife Miriam, and very soon to that of the little Ophelia. To women, Riverius showed his best side, and now found Mrs. Richmond kindly

and acceptable. As to Philetus, he had met him often in the lumber-camps, and knew him well.

Some three weeks later Riverius came to Mrs. Preston and said as she sat at her sewing, "I go away to-morrow. I hope to be back and forward for a while. Will you let me ask Philetus to put up for me a cabin outside of your clearing? I shall hope to be able sometimes to return, and then perhaps you will let me make some arrangement by which I can get my meals with you."

"As you please," she said, inertly. She was suffering from a bewildering sense of having nothing now to do, and from the sort of remorse such deaths leave to the woman who feels that she ought to be crushed and desolated and yet is not.

"Thank you," he said, simply; "and when I return, we can easily arrange the business part of it." Next day he was off at daybreak.

In the brief time since Paul Preston's death, Riverius had been, as was natural, a very frequent guest at Mrs. Preston's table. He provided trout, caught through holes in the ice, and some easily-gotten game, and, above all, made rapid and close acquaintance with the young Paul, who now reigned in the place of the father.

Riverius had been at school in England and France, but nowhere had he known the kind of lad who now excited his ever-ready interest. It seemed a thing worth study, a creature at the ductile age, bold, mischievous, thoughtless of consequences as a destructive kitten, surrounded by the physical lures with which nature wooes us back towards

barbarous life, and restrained and modified by the ever more difficult rule of a woman, the force of whose influence Riverius saw but could not as yet understand.

The value of physical courage the German perhaps over-esteemed, and the boy's fearlessness pleased him. The reckless fondness for dangerous sports and ventures attracted him. The good, well-taught manners and general frank pleasantness of the boy were to his mind, and he knew life well enough to guess that the dogged obstinacy of a clever, vain youthhood may become the reasoning resoluteness of the more intelligent man. It may by this time have been seen that Riverius was of those, the few, who with no ulterior object find the mere study of character attractive. Our own individualism prevents us from seeing our resemblances to others, and it was this, perhaps, which shut out from the German's mind the idea that in many ways the boy was like himself, John Riverius. Also Paul returned his liking in kind. There is mysterious and irresistible flattery in the dog you do not know who comes to rest his muzzle on your knee, and in the little one who of a sudden takes you into its life and shyly gives you to understand that you are an accepted friend. Very proud and reserved men often get on with boys as they do not with their equals in age, allow liberties, and enjoy with them a friendly freedom. And so it was that in a week or two of wandering and shooting with Paul, Riverius found himself talking of himself and his past life with an amount of ease, and even com-

fort, that at times surprised him. As to Mrs. Preston, he gave himself, save as to one thing, little thought. She was a faded woman, with handsome hair, certainly graceful, listless, apathetic, or self-absorbed in thoughts more or less painful, now and then beset with self-evident need to make certain decisions, which she feebly postponed from day to day. All her life she had been dutiful, and now to fail hurt her. She could not know that the will in a too weak body is like a proud king without an army. A vast sense of discomfiture oppressed her, and all life was for the time unreal and valueless. Riverius knew too little of this aspect of existence to take in or sympathize with her peculiar state. She was simply a lady in trouble, and he owed her the infinite obligation of a life saved. She, herself, just now had ceased to think of it. Any woodsman would have been cared for, fed, and housed, just as he had been, and the incident was, after all, commonplace in these woods, where in winter it was not rare that men perished of cold.

CHAPTER III.

Riverius was destined to remain away far longer than he had meant to be. It was June before he reappeared. Twice he had written formal letters of inquiry,—letters which lay in the post-office at Olean until some one was found who would promise to deliver them. Late in May, Mrs. Richmond persuaded her husband to let her go over with her child and stay near Mrs. Preston in the cabin Philetus had built for Riverius. She had the good sense to know how useful for the lonely forest child were Mrs. Preston and Paul, and for some little time the former had been urging them to come, with an increasing sense of need for other company than the indomitable and abrupt Becky. And now Paul was indeed very happy. The buds were everywhere unfolding, arbutus had come, and all the hill-sides were rich with its scent. An early spring had brought out the silvery dogwood-blossoms so that the forest spaces were lit with their starry multitude, and the Judas-trees showed a deep pink between.

Mrs. Preston sat on the grass with Miriam, and not far away Paul was building a vast pagoda with red and white corn-cobs, a delightful task, while on a stump near by the small Ophelia sat impatient at the lack of notice from the too-occupied architect.

The child was in many ways a curious contrast

to her parents,—intensely, even amazingly feminine, rather pale, or with the faintest pink in her cheeks, a delicately-made little person, slender of foot and hand, quick to see, eager to notice, innocently craving homage from those about her, and most of all from any male within reach of her devices.

Mrs. Preston was filling a dish on her lap with arbutus-blossoms, and now and then regaling herself with the odors of that most delicious of the gifts of spring. Miriam Richmond, seated beside her, was sewing buttons on a red flannel shirt. They gossiped gently of the loggers, the small news of the woods, of the children, and at last of Riverius.

"I wonder," said Miriam, "when he'll come back?"

"In about three weeks, he writes. What should bring him here, or why he wants to stay, I really cannot see."

"He's a right handsome man. He just stands up, like. Now, my Phil ain't an ill-lookin' man, but he don't hold himself up like that Riverius."

"Yes, I suppose he is rather nice-looking," said the widow. "Philetus might have been the better-looking; but this wood-life's so hard on the men."

"Well, I never did see a man just like that German. Phil says he's stuck up."

"I know what Philetus means. It is natural to one of Mr. Riverius's class,—his—well, his training, I mean."

"Wonder where he came from? Didn't you never ask him?"

"No."

"Dear me! I'm that curious, I'd want to know. Don't you?"

"No. By the way, that reminds me that Hieskill brought a letter over from Olean to-day from Mr. Riverius to my boy. How proud Paul will be! —Paul, Paul," she cried. "Here, my son," she said, as he came,—"here is a letter for you from Mr. Riverius."

It was the boy's first letter. The importance of the event was immense. He walked back to the girl and sat down on the ground.

"What have you got, Paul?" she said, in a small, soft, caressing voice. "Let Phely see."

"Only a letter," returned the boy, in a large, indifferent way.

"You might let me see."

Paul was otherwise minded. He opened it with care, and examined the post-mark and the large red seal, stamped with a coat of arms.

"What's that?—that red thing?"

He took no notice, but proceeded to spell out the not very easily read writing.

"Paul, I'm very nice. You like me."

He was re-reading this important document, out of which he had taken a ten-dollar note and put it in his pocket amidst a quaint collection of bits of string, a broken knife, horse-hair for trout-snoods, and the like.

"I've got a new dress."

Still no answer. Then the little maid got off her stump and came to his side.

"Me kiss you, Paul."

"Oh, don't bother!"

Thus rejected, she went over to the corn-cob castle and gave it a kick. Down it came in ruin. She looked up with a pretty little defiant expression to observe what would come of it. She had won his attention at last.

"You're a mean, bad girl!" he said. "I'll fix you." But the little sinner was away and had her head in her mother's lap before he could catch her.

"Paul, Paul," Mrs. Preston said, warningly. He paused. "I won't play with her again." And, so saying, he walked around the house.

"Here, Becky," he said, "this is from Mr. Riverius. He says he hopes you're a good girl, and no one is to know about the money. Now you mind that."

"Oh, I'm an awful good girl," said Becky. "I'm ten dollars gooder than I was," and plunged anew into the wash-tub.

Paul went back to his ruined castle.

"What does he say?" said his mother.

"Oh, he just says he's coming soon, and—and there's a secret. The rest's a secret."

"Tell me," said Miriam.

"I guess not."

The two women laughed.

"He'll tell me," said the small maid.

"No, he won't," said Paul. Then she proceeded to assist him in the work of reconstruction, gra-

ciously handing him the corn-cobs, one by one, and prattling incessantly.

"You ought to be proud of her," said Mrs. Preston. "She is really a winning little lady."

"Ophelia,—sweet Ophelia," said the mother.

Mrs. Preston laughed with genuine enjoyment. "My young Hamlet doesn't seem easily captured. What company the child is! She really seems to think it her business to entertain one. When she gets older, you will be troubled about her education. I suppose thinking of Paul makes me think of her too."

"That's the worst of this wilderness," said Miriam. "I don't mind its being lonely, but you can go away. I can't, and Phil blind. Oh, it's pretty hard to fix things."

"But I can't go away. I can live here, if this be life, but my lad's future terrifies me at times; and he is so masterful, as Philetus says."

Certainly Ophelia Richmond was distinctly a little lady of nature's cunning make. The good dame in this new land seems to have indulged her capricious self to the full. A rough, strong, Western man, a plain, fair-featured wife, and, behold, a child. If fortune favors him with wealth, the girl shares its advantages. By and by there is a handsome, noble-looking woman, quick to learn the ways of any greater world, adaptive, ready-witted, intensely feminine in her power,—a growth from the social soil of one generation, a thing elsewhere not possible.

The visitors were good for Bessy Preston. In

another world, such as the widow had left behind her, she would never have chanced upon Miriam, or their ways could never have run together. Mrs. Richmond looked up to her with an approach to reverence. Circumstances in her earlier life had made her of necessity studious of manners, and she felt that if the small maid ever grew to have the ease and control and pleasant fashions of this woman, it would leave little in that direction to be desired. She felt herself greatly flattered by their friendly relation, and did not estimate how much of it was due to the necessities which pushed them into alliance. And yet Bessy liked her well, as she liked truth and steadfastness wherever found. Together they worked, taught their children, read a little, and lived along in company with the May-days, until at last Miriam went away with little Phelia on the ox-cart.

Late at night a fortnight later, and early in June, a like rude conveyance came to a halt at the door of Riverius's cabin, having been sent to the river to meet his canoes. Riverius opened the door, went in, struck a match, and, seeing a candle, lit it. "Ach, Himmel!" he exclaimed. The bed was neatly made. There were four or five rough seats. Nets were tacked in the window-openings, an indispensable comfort. On the table were fresh rolls and cold bacon, and to one side a few flowers, belated arbutus chiefly, in a common soup-plate. For the first time he smelled the loveliest of wild flowers. The odor affected him curiously, and those who have not his intensity of appreciation

would find it hard to realize how it acted upon him. He felt faint for a moment, and then, again smelling the flowers, had a sense of joy he did not analyze.

"Ach, that was friendly," he said, and so went to bed, leaving his bundles and trunks out in the moonlight, and feeling perfectly at ease as to their safety.

When next morning at six he passed over the dewy clearing to breakfast at Mrs. Preston's, he saw of a sudden something which surprised him. Out of the door came to welcome him a tall woman, whom at a distance he did not instantly recognize. "She walks well," he said to himself. And it was true. There was ease, and for him some sense of strength with grace, or rather graciousness, in her steps. "It is Mrs. Preston," he exclaimed to himself. There was a slight color in her cheeks, a little more flesh everywhere. The great coil of hair above the cloud-blue eyes mysteriously suited the face below and brought out the vivid red of the geranium spray her boy had laughingly set in its coils a few moments before. Remembering when and under what circumstances they had last parted, she set herself with a faint sense of sudden embarrassment to look grave. The grim death-bed, the fierce resolute contest with another death, which had seemed as near the fair blond and manly visage, and then the German as she recalled him in the scattered sunlight beside the grave, under the pines, came back to her in succession. She was shocked, actually shocked, because, with all, there was an overtone in her mind of satisfaction in see-

ing this stranger. In fact, she was yet young, full of unexhausted resources, and, without distinctly knowing it, had begun anew to have the instinctive craving for the company of others of her own class and tastes and manners. She saluted him with a certain sobriety of greeting which did not quite fairly represent the satisfaction she had in a new face and intelligent society. "Paul will be very glad to see you," she said, giving him her hand.

At the breakfast-table he chatted gayly, talking of the people he had seen in and about Pottsville, and of the vast coal resources in its neighborhood. He had brought with him, to Bessy's delight, many books and some comforts for his own cabin and hers.

"I shall be back and forward," he said, "and it is a pleasant thing to feel that one has a home. How shall we settle our business affairs? I want to own my cabin and a few acres around it."

Bessy laughed. "It would be hard to value. The best pine is mostly cut, and really, Mr. Riverius, it is of no importance. I am only too well pleased for Paul's sake to have you near us when you are in these parts."

"Well, then, I am to be your tenant, and we shall have to set a rent."

"That will answer," she said, glad to be rid of the question. "You can think over what will be right. Whatever you say will satisfy me."

"I will consider it," he returned, gravely. "Becky will look after my cabin, and I shall pay her."

"As you choose."

"I ought to add that you will find me troublesome. I must ask you to keep my letters or readdress them according to what directions I may give. It seems a good deal to ask, at least for one who has only the claim of being already deep in your debt."

"You make too much of my small service. I shall be glad to do whatever I can."

"The giver may readily forget," he returned. "For my own part, and speaking with entire frankness, I know that if life be anything I owe it to you. I am young enough to value it, I assure you; and, if you will put yourself in my place, you will see that I may with reason feel a certain embarrassment."

She understood him, and liked the feeling he showed. "I can't very well realize what I have never felt," she said, and then, more lightly, "nor can I rearrange the chess-board of life and leave you with no sense of obligation. Let it suffice that I am glad to have helped you and that you feel it does not make me less pleased. I said once that I would have done the same for any one; but I may plainly admit that I would rather have done it for one of my own class than for Ance Vickers, or even Philetus."

"That is all very well, but it does not quite dispose of the matter for me. One often reads or hears of cases where a person saves another's life, and I have often wondered, in hearing or reading of such instances, how the obliged person felt and what he was called on to do."

"I see the difficulty; but I imagine many people do not feel the debt as you seem to do."

"As I do."

"Well, then, as you do." And she laughed. "I accept your amendment. But really you make too much of it."

"No." Then he paused, and added abruptly, "I hate debts that never can be cancelled."

"That is hardly a noble sentiment. Pardon my criticism."

"Well, take it for a mere weakness, and forgive its folly."

"I think you had better deal with it yourself," she answered, smiling. "You forget that I am a woman, alone, without friends, a waif drifted off from my own kind. You can give me what I value and shall find helpful,—a friendship. My life has been, as you know, a failure. Surely you can see that the accident which brought you to my door also brought me help in a day of great trouble. I am already repaid."

"You are more than kind, Mrs. Preston."

Then he took his rifle and went away into the woods with Paul. Mrs. Preston stood at the door, following them with her eyes as they went. The German had given a fresh flavor to her life, and of late, from Philetus, Miriam, and the woodsmen who at times paused at her door, she had heard many comments on the man who had come among them and acquired large interests and whose ways and manners were not altogether to the taste of the lumber-camps. To Elizabeth Preston it was clear

that he was highly educated, a gentleman, with the reserve of his class. The fact that he was too positive at times to be popular with the dwellers in the forest was also plain to her. That he was calmly kind and helpful, she also felt; but he was never so long with them as to enable her to learn more, even if her own nature had not made the task difficult.

With Paul he was on much easier terms. He liked to teach him, to talk to him, and to have him with him in his restless wanderings in the almost trackless forest about them. Certainly his company was good, and helpful for her boy. Now and then he spoke of leaving, and of the need to be absent long; but, save for brief journeys to the little towns in New York, he seemed to be intently busy with land and lumber interests. In fact, he liked the life, and by degrees had gone into large purchases which agreeably occupied his time and attention, so that he was beginning seriously to contemplate a permanent residence in the new country.

CHAPTER IV.

On a quiet noon of a warm day in July, Paul sat on a tall stump in the woods, his interest and attention divided between Philetus and the pungies, black flies and mosquitoes.

"Them pungies must be awful thick, Paul, the way you're a-slappin' 'em. Git up and build a smudge."

The boy rose. He smiled pleasantly, and, looking about with a pair of observant eyes, replied, as he gathered some dry sticks and piled on them a little rotten and damp wood, "I'd like to know what pungies are for, anyway. I wish I had them all in a bag on top of this fire. I guess they wouldn't be missed,—not much." And he struck a match with emphasis on the back of his polished and not over-clean corduroys.

The dark pungent smoke rose up to windward of the tall man, and swirled around his broad shoulders. He smiled, and, as he turned, it was seen that his eyes were dark and the pupils strangely dilated. A huge, gray, tangled beard hid his mouth, but the nose was large and bold, the forehead massive, and the ears stood out like small wings.

"I guess maybe pungies is puzzled to know what boys is for. When you know what rattlers is for, maybe the Lord 'ill let you know why pungies bother small boys. To keep 'em awake, maybe."

"I'm wide enough awake," said the lad; and, in fact, he looked it.

"Well, I don't say you don't use your eyes. Keep on a-usin' 'em. I used mine pretty well when I had 'em, and I ain't sorry, neither." The lad made no reply, and the man presently added, "That's the wust of havin' no eyes; makes a man use his tongue sich a lot. There's a heap of talk a man's eyes kin do, and git answers accordin', without sich eternal tongue-chatter." Then he paused a moment. "Ef I could see, I wouldn't have to wonder what makes you so quiet like."

A look of interested contemplation had meanwhile grown on the lad's face as he regarded the strong blind Samson still leaning on his axe-handle. "I was thinking," and he paused,—"I was thinking how sorry I am for you, and—and how bright and nice it is out here."

His companion caught his meaning instantly. "You allers did like me, Paul: I knowed that the first day I seen you. I don't mind bein' pitiful fur boys and women. As fur men, 'fore a man pities me he'd best see ef he kin fall thirty-three pines in a day and run a bob-sled to beat Philetus Richmond."

"But you can't break a jam now, Uncle Phil." Most of his fellows called him Uncle Phil, in gentle instinctive recognition of his forest rank and general kindliness of relation to the young.

"You hadn't oughter said that. Don't vou go to tell folks things they knows a derned sight too well."

The lad's face, prone to signal feeling, fell. He hitched up what he called his galluses (*Anglicé*, sus-

penders). The pair were quick of mental touch, and had some remote and one-sided kinship of moral structure.

"Lumber Bill was telling us last night how you found the key to the log-jam on the Sinnemahoning and broke it when there wasn't one of those Smethport chaps dared try it. That's what made me say it, Uncle Phil. I'm sorry. I might have guessed."

"Well, Paul Preston, I didn't mind,—much. Cur'us how a thing comes into a fellow's mind and kind of squeezes out another thing he needn't of said. Don't you be afeerd of sayin' soft things to folks that's down. Not that I'm down much. You're like that there mother of yourn. I guess most real fellows has a gal's heart somewhere. Where's that other axe? Fetch it, lad. This 'ain't no edge."

Paul brought the axe, and sat down again on the stump and fought the midges, while he silently watched Philetus. The woodsman rolled his sleeves up over a pair of tawny, knotted arms, threw down his ragged straw hat, whirled the blue steel around his head, and smote deep into the stately pine against which he had been leaning. Blow followed blow with marvellous precision. The fragments of odorous pine flew far and wide, the solid trunk rang resonant through its dense core, and the branches above shivered as if conscious. By and by he had cut two-thirds through the great bole. Then he paused.

"Look sharp," he said. "I give him three more

licks, and then look out. He'll fall north, among them birches. Guess that'll clear him. Ther' ain't no pines to stay him."

A look of increasing interest crossed the boy's face as he spoke: "How do you know the north, Uncle Phil?"

The giant laughed as he bent his head and wiped against his rolled-up red sleeve the sweat of his brow. "What! you've been a year or more round these woods and don't know the moss likes the north side of trees?" And, as he spoke, he patted the slightly swaying bole.

"I did know it, but I forgot you could feel it just as well as I can see it."

"Ef I lived long enough, I do believe I'd git eyes at them finger-ends. Perhaps you'd like to know how I guess three licks 'ill make a dead tree of this here pine?"

The boy smiled. "I was thinking that. How do you guess so, Uncle Phil?"

"Heerd your mind, maybe. You come here. Now you jus' listen. Put your head nigh that tree. There, ag'in' it. Ain't it speakin'?"

The boy was aware of creaking, crackling sounds, as the south wind moving the vast height of the pine broke fibre after fibre of the slight wedge-shaped base on which it still rested. A faint sense of something akin to pity seized the lad as he looked up at its warrior pride of clean-limbed trunk and wholesome leafage. He was not yet old enough to capture the fleeting reasons for his faint emotion.

"Kind of groans, I call 'em," said Philetus.

Then his face changed, and it was singularly expressive. Something of the rough primitive woodking grew upon it,—a wild joy in destruction.

"Wish I could see him smash them gay birches! Can hear it, anyways."

"I didn't ask what made you know they're birches." This lad was to lose nothing in life for lack of a questioning tongue.

"I heerd 'em, Paul. 'Ain't they got ragged britches, them birches?—and don't I hear the rags flap? Every feller oughter be blind ten years and deaf ten more, and then git his eyes and ears. He'd know a heap, I tell you he would. Don't the wind talk diff'rent in a pine and a beech and a poplar? You jus' shet yer eyes and git that ther' language. Now look sharp. Them birches don't guess what's a-comin'. It's me or the Lord Almighty as has doomed 'em. These many years 'twas so set as I was to do it, and they was to bide it." This musing, half-mystical mood, the outcome of a partially-forgotten creed, was at times common enough with Philetus to astonish his comrades, but not so completely as it would have done a like class elsewhere. He went on, "'Most always it is three goes or nine,—I disremember." Then he added, "'Tain't fair to be talkin' sich wisdom to boys. Only you mind, when you git older, thet ther's a man named Swedenborg that knowed things and critters and rocks inside their great-coats, and don't you go to thinkin' I'm a-talkin' nonsense, when you can't take it in."

The lad stood puzzled, but respectful and silent.

He had in after-years the habit of saying nothing when he had nothing to say, and, being of a widely curious appetite for knowledge, had the mental art of the attentive listener.

After a pause Philetus said, "You don't understand."

"No, I don't."

"Wall, you'd like to. That's goin' to be your kind; but ther's growed-up people jus' laughs and says I'm out of their depths. When I see a man in two foot water yellin' for help and thinkin' he's out of his depth because he 'ain't got the judgment to stan' up on the legs God giv' him, it makes me mad. Now fur it. Git back a piece."

Paul retreated, and with eager interest watched the strokes of doom. Once,—twice,—thrice; the forest rang to the blows. The great sheaf of green bowed as the south wind swayed it, stood erect again, then bent its proud state as never once before to storm or cumbering snows its strength had bowed. Slowly as a monarch with no haste of fear lays his head upon the block, it moved to its fall. Then, with a strange noise of cracking fibres below and swifter motion above, the tall shaft fell with a crash, amidst innumerable lesser sounds of the torn branches of down-tumbled birches and the quick swish of beaten leaves. The woodman leaned on his axe.

"I done that there job well. I kin handle an axe yet, Paul Preston. My strength ain't much abated."

"It was splendid, Uncle Phil. I wish I could chop like you!"

"You'll chop with them brains of yourn some day, I guess. What was't that man at your house said? Somethin' 'bout choppin' logic. For all he was two weeks in my house, I never kin call him rightly."

"Oh, Mr. Riverius," cried the boy, laughing. "I think he meant just arguing, you know."

"That ain't your kind nuther, younker. You've got the same way your mother's got of hearin' things out to the end of 'em, and then a-sayin' somethin' short and quick. I don't like that there man much. He's too sot in his ways. He's the kind hangs about women. I never cum home he ain't a trapseyin' 'round, talkin' to Myry. Guess he'd 'a' died ef it hadn't 'a' bin for Mrs. Preston. Couldn't of knowed much, anyway, to git in a scrape like that." He had a fine sense of the humiliation there was in the fact of the man he disliked having needed help from a woman.

"Well, he knows a lot," urged the boy, defensively, remembering much kindly helpfulness and their frequent talk of other lands and the greater world Paul longed to see.

"Yes, he knows inside of books. He's got a notion God ain't writ nuthin' but books. I say God writ in the souls of men; and when you hears a man talkin' wisdom, that's nigher truth than books is."

"But suppose a man puts his wisdom into books?" pleaded the boy. "Isn't that the same, Phil?"

"'Tain't got the life in it."

"Oh!" said the boy, puzzled, and taking time to reflect.

"I allus did wonder what fetched that 'ere man up into these here woods. It's nigh about two years since he come. He must own a power of land round about. He's got judgment 'bout land, but he ain't got none 'bout men. He's too much boss for Philetus Richmond."

Paul was silent. He knew well enough that the German's abrupt soldierly methods were foreign and repugnant to the woodmen he employed.

"Now you go call ole Consider," said Philetus. "I've been a-hearin' his axe this half-hour. What did I say *call* for? You might as well call the dead."

"I'll bring him," said Paul, and went away at a trot through the woods. Presently he came upon a small, rather stout man of some fifty years, who was busy passing a tape-measure around a tree. He did not move until the boy touched him. Then he turned a clean-shaven face, simple and honest in expression, but remarkably sweetened by the smile that now lit it up. Speech was useless with him. He was utterly deaf; but the boy, evidently accustomed to his needs, pointed towards the place he had left, and, laughing, pulled at the man's sleeve and slapped his own stomach.

"Grub-time, and Philetus waitin'. I'll come. Hold on a bit."

He ended his task, pocketed his tape, lifted his axe, and moved away silent. As they came near Philetus, he said, with a curious softness in his tones,—

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"Kep' you bidin' a bit, ears." The deaf man smiled. "Old eyes won't hear, Paul," added the blind woodman. "Come along. He'll foller. Belly's a good clock. Mine gits fast nigh feedin'-time."

Consider came after them with a sort of quiet patience, and now and then dropped a remark to his friend. The pair made a queer couple. Years before, over a log camp-fire, and then in the woods, they had formed a friendly and useful partnership in life to which one brought eyes and the other ears. They usually bargained to work together, and in fact were rarely long apart, the smaller man, with his round simple visage and pug-like tilt of atrophied nose, being little more than a trusty canine guide to the stanch, blind man, away from whom he had the restlessness of a creature who misses his master.

"Take care of that felled tree, Phil," he said.

"All right, Consider. Come along." He spoke always turning his face to his friend, who was quick to catch his meaning. "I hear the horn at Widder Preston's. Mus' be that small Becky, or the man —I've forgot his name ag'in, Paul."

"Think of the Alleghany," laughed the lad, "Riverius."

"Dern sech a name! He don't git much breath into that 'ere horn." And as he spoke they came into the stumps of the clearing, and saw the river sparkling beyond the log cabin, and in the foreground, on a stump, a short woman's figure, blowing with much effort a long tin horn which gleamed in the strong noonday light. The two woodmen and the boy paused a hundred yards away at the

snake fence which kept the cows in their pasture-field. Meanwhile, to the left, the figure on the stump blew again another blast, unaware that the persons she was thus signalling were close at hand. Even to the lad's accustomed eye there was something humorous in this stout little creature balancing herself now and then with outstretched arms on the sloped stump-top.

The two men as they presently climbed the snake fence came to a rest for a moment on the upper rail. The elder man—and he may have been sixty-five years—had some half-felt sense of fun in the notion of the fat little person thus innocently posed on the forest pedestal of a blackened pine stump. His dog-like companion, now sunning his bald round head, with his toes tucked into the third rail of the fence for comfortable stay, understood all this well enough, and had a canine capacity for accepting the moods of his friend. His perceptions came slowly, but were true enough, and his round head wagged responsive as the dog's tail, in cheerful, quite honest applause and acceptance of whatever came to him from Philetus. He glanced now in his habitual way at the strong, sombre, blind visage lit up for the moment with a smile, and then looked anew at the dark figure exhausting its breath on the horn. He had, unlike his friend, whose humor was rather grim, a natural but tardy sense of the mirthful aspects of life. Slowly now a grin drew out the corners of his mouth and spread smooth the convenient little furrows which fell from them and were as comfortable scuppers darkly indicative of leakage

from excessive quid within. In a moment or two the gathering fulness of amusement puckered the fat cheeks and half shut the eyes, and he chuckled aloud. The giant leaning on the fence looked up with his changeless areas of dark eyes. As usual, he made haste to complement his comrade's defect,—a process now become with both men automatic in less as well as greater matters.

"Must look ridikelus, to see a woman bustin' herself like that 'ere and gittin' no kind of decent sound." He patted the small man on the leg to call his attention, and then expanded his own cheeks in sign of appreciative comment. Then he twitched Consider's sleeve, which was at once comprehended as a desire for descriptive help from his partner's eyes.

"She's a-rockin' on that there burnt stump nigh the well. Guess Gabril couldn't blow no harder. And she don't see us,—she don't," which last fact so convulsed the small man that at length the graver woodman of a sudden broke into a laugh which was volcanic and astounding in its vigor and was heard far and near.

"He's a-laughin' awful, Paul. I feel the fence shake," said Consider. "Mostly I kin fetch him."

At the sound Becky came down awkwardly from the stump, and, after hanging the tin horn on a nail under the cabin eaves, walked to the door-way, whence came out, also summoned by the giant's laugh, Mrs. Paul Preston. She bent to break off a dead leaf or two from the little bed of geraniums on either side of the door-stone, and then stood

still in the entrance to meet the workmen and her boy. A gray linen dress fitting closely her arms and figure, with no excess of skirts, showed her rather unusual height and notable but not unwholesome slightness of build. The features, delicate of model, were largely fashioned. The complexion was less pale than it had been a year ago. An unusual mass of dark-brown hair was coiled with neatness on the back of her head, which carried its weight well. Thinness does not exclude the chance of that grace which is often denied to the essential fulness of beauty; and grace she had, in motion, voice, and ways. As she rose up from her little task, she glanced quickly at her hands, hard with labor, but scrupulously clean to the broken but spotless nails, and then smiled, seeing a spot or two on the long white apron she wore. Turning back, she undid its tie, threw it on a chair-back, and, coming out to the cabin door again, awaited the arrival of the little group which had paused on the way.

As the two men and Paul crossed the clearing, they were joined by the German as to whom Philetus had so distinctly expressed himself to Paul. His straight carriage, and the long amber-tinted moustache on a face otherwise clean-shaven, made sharp contrast with the slouching, careless figures of the two woodmen. He gave them a cheerful good-morning, touching Paul in an affectionate way on the shoulder. His manner was frank and pleasant, and gave no note of the decisive abruptness he carried into affairs or with which he issued orders to those whom he instinctively treated as more or less in-

telligent machines. He was probably well aware both of the peculiarity of his manner and of its unfitness for the men about him; but the ways and habits of command are difficult to forget, and he made less effort to change them than was perhaps wise or politic.

"Let me carry your rifle, sir," said Paul, and proudly shouldered the gun. "What a lot of squirrels you've got!" he added.

"Clean shot," said Consider Kinsman, handling them as they lay where the hunter had dropped them at his feet. "Two on 'em barked," he added, in the high pitched voice of the deaf. "They caughter all on 'em been barked."

"That is so," said Riverius. "Becky will growl at the state they are in."

"Kill any rattlers?" said Consider. "They're thick as mildges down Laurel Mountain way."

"I never kill them. Why you men always murder them I cannot see. They never attack you unless you come too near. They don't run. They are as brave as any of you."

Consider gave it up, unable to follow.

"You're ag'in' Scriptures, Mr. Ryverus," said Philatus. "The seed of the woman's got to bruise the sarpent's head. It was so set in the beginnin'."

"I admit the order, but decline to obey," returned the German, smiling. "Even your friend Swedenborg doesn't insist on it."

"It's for a flesh sign of evil. Them that don't slay it for a livin' sin, they're a-goin' to let it live in the spirit."

"Well, Philetus, the rattlesnake as a scapegoat is certainly a novelty. A dozen or so a day ought to give a man a pleasant margin of wickedness. Do you take size into account?—There's Becky. Pick up the squirrels, Paul."

Philetus made no reply. He disliked greatly to have his mystical fancies lightly regarded. He liked as little the precision of thought with which, in his graver mood, Riverius met and overthrew his theories. The woodman's age and reputation for former prowess with axe and rifle caused the rough men of the woods to listen with mere indifference or show of attention to Philetus when in his moods of obscure reflection and as obscure statement, but in the German these raised a smiling comment or aroused him to distinct attack, neither of which Philetus liked.

At the door Mrs. Preston met them, the men moving away towards the well. "You have been fortunate," she said to Riverius, glancing at the squirrels Paul carried.

"Yes, I had a pleasant tramp."

Then she turned to the boy. "Where are the eggs?" she said.

"I did not go for them, mother."

"And why not? When you left me, I told you to go to Mrs. Richmond's. There is not an egg in the house."

"Philetus said it was no use, mother. The foxes, he says, have scared them so they don't lay worth a cent."

"But I told you to go."

"I know, mother; but what was the good?"

"Well, and what do you propose to do about it?"

"Why, there isn't anything to do."

"Indeed!" she said, quietly.

He cast a shy, embarrassed look up at her face. It was grave, and as stern as gentle nature let it be. He got no comfort from his study, and went away in silence around the cabin.

Meanwhile, Consider let down the bucket on its balanced pole into the shallow well, and presently both workmen, having partaken of water within and without, went to the kitchen door, back of which, on a permanently-placed roller, hung a rough towel, of which each made use. When they looked out, the boy was not in sight, but the mother with Riverius was waiting for them at the well.

"Philetus Richmond," she said, "you should not have kept that boy from doing what I told him to do."

Truth was a part of the old fellow's essential life. He answered, frankly, "Well, ma'am, fact was, I were a mawsel lonesome, not havin' Consider handy, and—well, the foxes has bin a-furagin'."

"It must not happen again," she said.

"No, ma'am," he returned, meekly, while the deaf man looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"Come in to dinner," she added, and, as they followed, Riverius approached her.

"Where is Paul?" he said.

"I do not know. I am vexed with him. All

the men spoil him. I must get him away from here."

"I will go over this afternoon and bring what eggs there are." He spoke with a barely perceptible German accent, and the tones were refined.

"No," she said. "Come in. Becky is away, so I cooked myself: indeed, myself is pretty well cooked. As to the potatoes, I am in doubt; but Becky made the pie. Come in."

The log house was comfortable enough. Within, the walls were clay-plastered to fill the chinks, and then covered with splints or axe-hewn boards from the outer side of logs. Over these, in the rather ample sitting-room, Mrs. Preston, with aid from Paul, had laboriously tacked large rolls of ruddy and gray birch-bark. Rough planks across the timbers gave the unusual luxury of a ceiling, like the walls birch-covered, above which in the loft slept Paul, except when the winters drove him to sleep below in the common sitting-room. A huge fireplace of unhewn granite rocks projected from the farther wall. Above, on a chimney-plank, were the two candlesticks which had attracted the German's notice. The chairs were ugly and solid; the table, a product of some woodcraftsman's tools, was strong and grimly useful. In curious contrast, the Raphael Morghen of Guido's Crucifixion hung in a worn frame on the wall, the sole ornament. Here and there, however, on the birch-bark, a brush of unusual skill had been busy, and had scattered about, in odd caprice, admirably-rendered portraits of golden-rod, asters, dogwood-blossoms, and cardi-

nal flowers. Over the chimney a mass of sheep-laurel and the larger rhododendrons was still unfinished. All were dimly visible by the light which entered scantily through gnarled panes of glass which distorted the landscape without into singular deformity. On one side opened the bedroom of the owner, and outside was a rough kitchen, above which the woman Becky slept, unless the intense cold of winter drove her, like Paul, to a shake-down on the floor of the room beneath. However primitive, this was probably the best house for miles around, and its owner a person socially and in education far above any of her neighbors.

The table was spread, not in the kitchen, as usual, but in the sitting-room, to escape the heat which a July day made more than sufficient. There was no cloth. A dish of trout, a bit of bacon with eggs, the potatoes as to which Mrs. Preston had expressed doubts, an apple-pie, set all at once on the well-scrubbed board, made up the meal. As they stood a moment, Riverius stroked his tawny moustache, looked up and said aloud, with distinctness, "Give us this day our daily bread." Then they sat down. The silver forks marked with a worn crest alone distinguished the meal from that of any forest home on the swift Alleghany. Philetus took his fork in his fist, with a certain awkwardness, and mentally surveyed the instrument, wishing that he had what he called a real fork. Consider helped him with care, at times glancing at the plate to see that he had enough. The

meal went on rather quietly; a sense of entire social equality was the forest custom, and employer and employed lived and ate together in a common life of mutual respect, but almost absolute familiarity of relation. A certain undefined quality in the ways and manners of Mrs. Preston was, however, felt and acknowledged by the rough men with whom she was so much in contact. Her husband when alive was to them simply Paul Preston, and, little as he relished the fashion, soon gave up all form of protest; but his wife was Mrs. Preston to all, and, to some of the older New-Englanders, Madam, after the now extinct usage, a survival of colonial days. It amused her a little, but she did not dislike the distinction.

"Where is that boy?" at last said Riverius. "He has a fierce young stomach. Shall I call him?"

"No," said the mother. "I would rather not."

Consider, as usual, seeming to know what was going on, caught at the name. "Might Paul go with me to ketch hell-benders Saturday? I've been a-promisin' him. I know whar ther's a lot on 'em."

She shook her head.

"What are hell-benders, please?" said Riverius. "Certainly the name does not assist one."

"Sorter small dragon beast, lives in the mud," answered Philetus.

At this moment the lad broke into the room, his eyes a little red, his face flushed. "Keep me some dinner, mother. I'm going over to Miriam Richmond's after those blessed eggs."

She rose up and kissed him.

"And some pie, mother."

She sat down. "Where's your hat, Paul?"

"Oh!" he said, smiling, and doffed his head-cover. "Good-by."

At the door he looked back, and the two pair of cloud-blue eyes met and said to one another, "We understand: unpleasant, this, but necessary."

CHAPTER V.

A MOMENT later Paul was away, gayly jumping the stumps as he went, and with a keen desire for the dinner he had left behind. Once past the snake fence, he left the ox-road, and without hesitation passed into the dense forest. Presently he stopped, took off his jacket, undid the suspenders, and, using them as a strap to sustain the coat and compress the expostulatory cravings of a boy's empty interior, set off again at a steady trot without hesitation through what would have been for a city-bred boy a pathless wilderness. There was much of the mother in the lad, and this perhaps made it easier for her to influence him than it would have been for any one without a personal key to the complicated lock of character. Some boys are best in the hands of men, but there are others who prosper better when controlled by women who understand them and whose natures admit of none of the compromises to which men are more apt to be subject. The lad was of a certain resoluteness which grew to obstinacy in the face of opposition. Active resistance excited him into unreason, but the passive feminine steadiness of a woman merely stopped him like a wall which arrests one but is not actively antagonistic. Then always, soon or late, his passionate admiration for the mother and his warm affection did the rest. It

was well for him that the life of cities was to come later. He was fortunate in that friendly Nature took a hand in his education. Existence in this wild land was hard, but awakened no passions, had no feeders for the personal pride from which resolute and yet refined characters may suffer under the influences of social and other forms of adversity. The people about him were mostly adults, and too plainly his superiors in one and another way for comparison. He had, like all boys worth anything, his childish ideals, and in one or another of those near him found enough for good example.

He paused a minute to breathe as he crossed a deserted clearing and passed near a ruined cabin. Suddenly his eyes flashed, and he smiled. Under the eaves was a huge gray mass like a crumpled ball of gray wrapping-paper, a great hornet-nest. He seized a stone and with unerring skill sent it into the hive, and, shouting defiance, fled with a hundred winged and wrathful warriors after him. They went by, missing him, with a ping, ping, like bullets. Then he cried, "Oh!" as a happier shot struck fair in the back of his neck, and he hesitated whether or not to drop safely in a bed of ferns, but his habitual inborn hatred of defeat came uppermost, and, seizing a dogwood bough, he broke it, and, turning, faced the foe as he struck to right and left. Half a minute ended it, and he sat by a little puddle on a stump and counted up his wounds. There was one on the lip that hurt and promised to swell nobly, one on the cheek, and a very unpleasant one somewhere inside his trousers from a too en-

terprising hornet. He applied a little mud to each wound, and at last extracted the dead hornet which had caused him a moment of anguished dance such as a dervish might have envied. He had not quite run away, and, pleased with himself, he made note of an intention to come back and have it out with the enemy, which had now returned to its stronghold. A half-hour more brought him to a slope, on which, as usual amid mouldered stumps and backed by waving corn-pennons, was the cabin of Philetus Richmond.

Some fifteen years before, Philetus, a man of fifty, well preserved and not yet blind, was for a few days in a small inn at Harrisburg. Thither they brought from a travelling dramatic company an actress not over twenty years of age and suddenly taken ill with a fever, and here they left her. Very soon her money was exhausted. Philetus had seen her play when for the first and last time he had been present in a theatre. The story of her misery moved his heart. The possible fall from the magnificent being he had beheld in her glory as Ophelia to a probable death in the poor-house troubled him. He helped her quietly out of his small savings, and at last, when she was still feeble and had before her the sad prospect of a long and tedious convalescence, he further aided her to find a temporary home. She was but a third-rate actress in a strolling company, and with no near relations who cared to help her. When Philetus had seen her act Ophelia, she had merely taken the place of another and better performer for a time.

Her usual rôles were unimportant, and her wages small. When the sturdy woodman at last found courage to ask her to marry him, her overestimate of her own chances on the stage was the chief opponent influence. Gratitude, isolation, poverty, may all have affected her final decision, but the physical stateliness of this ample-shouldered giant, still strong and vigorous, had also a share. Certainly she loved him at last, despite the disparity in years. She had little education except such as a common actress might get from her stage training and experience, and, being intensely feminine, slight and pretty, was, like such women, allured by a profoundly masculine temperament. Accustomed to manual work in her youth, she took kindly to the conditions of her forest life, and if at times she had moments of regret and longing for the foot-lights, she usually concealed or set them aside, and perhaps remembered too well her former trials and uncertainties. The life was less lonely when some years later a little girl was born. Soon after Philetus became hopelessly blind, and then all that was best in his wife was gradually called out in varied shapes of helpfulness. The little money he had spent to help her years before was a good investment, and there was enough of mutual admiration to flavor the love which the child served to knit anew with ties which grew increasingly stronger year by year. Like many men who marry much younger women, he was more or less jealous, a peculiarity intensified by the suspiciousness from which the blind rarely escape altogether. Except

for its occasional hardships, her married life brought her but one grave trouble. Very early she learned to her cost that her sturdy mate was incapable of taking a single glass of liquor without being morally poisoned. He knew and hated this single weakness, but could at times be led into self-indulgence. Since Mrs. Preston's arrival, Philetus's wife had, however, a potent ally, and the two women, conscious of their respective burdens, had for each other a friendly regard quite curious in two persons so far apart in many ways.

As the boy came near the cabin, he heard at a distance Mrs. Richmond's voice in tones of angry remonstrance. He paused. A lumberman in rough linsey-woolsey and high boots was standing just within the door-way, a broad, squarely-built man, slightly bow-legged, as Paul saw him from behind. Again Miriam Richmond's voice, high-pitched in wrath, was heard by Paul:

"No, he's not at home, Ance Vickers; and if he was, he shouldn't go to work at Smith's with you, I tell you that."

The lad paused, a little surprised, somewhat interested. Moreover, the burly woodman's figure blocked the door-way, and Paul hesitated to go by.

"You allus keep a-thinkin' I want to git your man into trouble."

"Yes, you give him whiskey, that's what you do."

"But ef you'd jus' listen, Myry——"

"And I won't listen. You go away, that's all. I command you to depart," said the ex-actress, who was apt when roused to recall the foot-lights.

"An' what ef I ain't minded to go? Ther' ain't no one I likes well's you. Ther' ain't no woman I likes as much. You 'ain't no call to talk fierce to me."

"I don't want to be liked by any one but my husband. Now get out of this at once. You are the only man can make Phil drink. One way and another, you're driving me hard, Ance Vickers. Do you hear? Out of that door with you! Lord, if I was a man, I'd kill you, you drunken sot."

"Now, for the nicest woman on the Alleghany to be a-talkin' that 'ere way! Let's make up, Myry." And, so saying, he moved into the room, a look of maudlin affection in his face.

"Don't you dare to come near me!" said Miriam. Close after him followed Paul.

"Ah!" she added, much relieved. "That's you, Paul Preston. Come in." Her rage was still high, and she foolishly said, "If you were a man I'd just ask you to kick that drunken cur out of my cabin."

"What's the row?" said the boy, surveying the shock of red beard, the close-cropped stubble of the head, ruddy as autumn buckwheat, and the liquor-reddened eyes.

"Ther' ain't no row."

"Would be if Philetus was here," said Miriam.

"You're pretty drunk, Ance," said the boy, with all the courage of his opinions.

"That's so," added Miriam.

"You crow pretty loud for a small bantam. For mighty little, I'd shingle you well."

The boy flushed. "You couldn't catch me in a

week." And he glanced about, ready for a prudent retreat.

"You'll keep," returned Ance; "and mind you git a civil tongue in your head, ef you don't want a lickin'. That's all."

"If I tell Phil you've been abusing Myry, somebody else will get a licking," cried the lad, feeling all the insult of Ance's threat.

"Try it ef you jus' dare," said Ance, looking furious, and not quite liking the threat.

"Oh, he ain't been abusing me," added Miriam, quickly. "You mind your own business, Paul. I can talk to Phil when it's wanted." At which Paul, rather puzzled and a little hurt, was suddenly silenced.

"I didn't go to hurt you, Myry," said Ance. "I'm your friend, I am." And he smiled in the silly confidential way of the man a trifle overloaded with whiskey. "Good-by, and jus' you think it over about Smith's. Good-by, Myry." And, so saying, he found his way out and slowly meandered among the stumps and down the slope. The boy glanced after him and then turned. "Don't cry," he said. "He's no good."

"He has been here twice to-day. If I was to tell Phil—— Come here. You're a brave boy. You weren't afraid of him, were you?"

"I guess not."

Miriam kissed him,—a thing he loathed. She was rather fond of this mode of expressing her regard for the boy, and now he skilfully got the table between them to avoid repetition of the dose.

"I wish he had tried it on," he said, laughing. "You'd have seen some fun. He's not half as bad as hornets."

"So I see. I've got some eggs for your mother. They're in the basket. Now, don't you go after hornets any, or you'll break them; and don't you tell Phil Ance Vickers was here."

"All right; but I don't see why. I'd lick him well if I was Phil. Good-by." As he set foot on the fence, he heard her call, "Paul Preston!"

"Halloo!" She came slowly over the field, buxom, rosy, and very straight; at times a remembrance of the stage in her movements. The boy settled himself upon his perch on the fence-top, watching her with a certain sense of satisfaction at her full rounded form, liking it as he liked the sun of a cold day.

"You did not well to make me tramp hither, Paul. Why did not you come to meet me when I summoned you?"

Paul had ceased to be surprised at her lapses into a style of speech above the familiar occasion. With due respect for the eggs, he got to the ground, a queer, amused glimmer of fun on his face. "The fact is, Mrs. Richmond, I forgot. I—I was thinking."

"And pray, sir, of what?"

He had a little doubt as to the propriety of the statement her question should have called forth.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, I was thinking you looked——"

There was still much of the child in the woman. She urged, "What? how do I look?" and advanced

so that Paul, in dread of another kiss, found himself cornered in the fence-angle with an awkward explanation in front, a more awkward basket of eggs as impedimenta, and no chance of a dignified and safe retreat.

"Well, I was thinking of you."

"Ah!" she cried, cunningly expectant. "And what did you think?"

"Oh, I just thought you were awful handsome. There's stuff like your hair grows down by Bond's brook." And he flushed like a girl.

"Oh, is that all?" said Miriam. "I ain't what I was." She would have liked to make clear to him how pleased she really was, not lacking pride in her appearance and in the rather tumbled gold of her hair, but no phrase came to lip which seemed to her fitting, and by this time, taking base advantage of her doubt, he had wriggled through the fence. There he enjoyed her embarrassed look in security.

"I ain't what I was," she repeated, half sadly.

"Mother says when you're with Phely, you just get beautiful."

"Oh, Paul!"

"She did. She said so. Where is Phely?"

"Asleep, I guess. She's been huckleberryin', and got tired. Come over and play with her soon, and tell mother I'll be along Sunday for sure. And, oh, here's what I wanted. Mind you don't tell Philetus about that Anson Vickers. Promise me."

The kiss was not yet fully avenged, and he felt disposed to tease her. "I don't know. He might ask me."

"Oh, he won't, Paul. Look here, you mustn't. There'd be trouble. Now promise me."

"All right," he said, quickly, glancing somewhat puzzled at her anxious face. "I won't."

"Thank you. I'll have dumplings for you when you come over."

"I don't care for dumplings," he said. The statement was hardly correct, but he felt the notion of the bribe to be incompatible with his dignity. "I said I wouldn't, and I won't. Good-by."

He went down the slope to the little brook below, paused to turn over a stone or two in search of crayfish, and passed into the wood. On the whole, he felt cheerfully contented with himself, and went along whistling until he came into the deserted clearing. There he paused abruptly. "Oh!" he exclaimed, a sudden gleam of mischief in his face. "He'll spank me, will he?" Sound asleep in the shadow of the hut lay his enemy, Ance Vickers, very red, very hot, and unconscious of the mosquitoes, who were engaged in a reckless debauch on the dilution of corn whiskey in his heated veins. "Great Scott, won't he scratch to-morrow?" said the boy to himself. The situation was too tempting for the human nature of any reasonably constituted lad. He went quietly into the woods, deposited the basket in a thicket, cut a long stick, and watchfully returned to the cabin. There he paused in anticipative delight. His strong foe, whom the Delilah whiskey had given over into the hands of the young Philistine, lay, face upward, unconscious in the yet vigorous sun of a failing day of July. Above him,

but a few feet away, the gray hornet-citadel seemed tranquil enough, and but a little the worse for recent war. Around it a half-dozen watchful sentinels crawled or flew. Surveying the situation, Paul reflected. He would stand at the corner of the cabin, stir up the gray fortress, and, having thus brought about a personal difficulty between Ance and the hornets, leave the man and the winged lancers to settle it, whilst he, in noiseless moccasins, sped away from danger. It was well planned, and, after boy-law, a righteous retribution,—skill and opportunity against insult and brute force. His allies, the hornets, were sure to insist, after the lynch-law fashion of the woods, on the nearest man as the guilty one. But that Ance should suffer without knowing who punished him would leave the matter rather incomplete, so far as the boy was concerned. Moreover, he must tell some one, for not to share the fun of it with another was a thing not to be thought of. It might be Riverius he would tell. But to confess to that gentleman how he had smitten his foe at second hand and run away was not so pleasant to think of as he recalled certain looks and words with which the German had received some story of trick or stratagem which set the winter camp-fires in a roar of applause. That settled it for Paul. The next moment, as he would have said, he prodded Ance Vickers sharply with the staff he had just cut. The sleeper groaned, rolled over, and muttered, "Myry Richmond, she's the gal."

"George, but that's fun!" said Paul to himself.

"Here goes." At a second rather savage dig in the shoulder from the boy behind him, now alert and grimly watchful, Ance sat up, rubbing his eyes and groping about for his straw hat. "Oh, dern them skeeters!" he said. At this moment Paul thrust his stick through the nest, and, crying aloud, "Take a shingle to me now, Ance Vickers," fled around the cabin, and a hundred yards away turned to reckon the fruits of his victory. The result was all that could be desired. The red shock of hair was full of hornets. They were down the man's neck, up his sleeves, in his breeches. Every boy has wondered how they get there. For a brief moment Ance was in doubt as to both cause and consequence, the result somewhat disturbing his power to attend to its author. It was a novel means of sobering a man, but, as usual with great inventions, brought the author small share of gratitude. Ance leaped to his feet, tore at his hair and beard, slapped with frantic gestures at mysterious sharp-shooters under his breeches, and danced with a wild agility which Paul felt to be far beyond his own recent performance.

"Take a shingle, Ance," cried the maker of the mischief.

"Oh, I'll be even with you! Oh!" and he swore fiercely. "Jus' wait!" And with that he started at unexpected speed after the boy, who fled reeling with laughter and with no intention of abiding the onset.

"Catch me first!" he cried, and was away down the slope as fast as a pair of active legs could take

him, the foe in deadly earnest hard after him and a furious train of attentive hornets in the rear. Now, when a man has in front just cause for vengeful haste and after him equal urgencies in the shape of legions of angry hornets, even a little too much whiskey may not retard him greatly; and Ance had slept off a fair amount of his drunkenness. For a while the race was pretty even. The youngster doubled and turned, and, coming to an open pine grove, ran across it like a deer. Then there was undergrowth, and the strong woodman had the advantage as the panting boy struggled through it, wishing he had taken a longer start of his foe, but still impenitent enough. At last, looking back, he saw that furious red face within twenty yards, and felt that his own wind was almost gone. Under ordinary circumstances he would have stopped and faced the enemy, being a gallant little fellow, but a second glance at the ferocious visage, now lit up with security of vengeance, decided him. He did not like the man's looks. Instantly selecting a tree, Paul swarmed up it with his last remnant of strength, and was well out of reach before Ance stood beneath him. Catching a full breath, Paul reached a branch, swung himself up to a second, and at last sat secure in the maple leaves twenty feet above his pursuer, who stood silent and grim, for a moment breathing too hard to speak. Paul could see him, but he himself was partly hidden by the thick intervening foliage between them. With new belief in his security, the boy's spirits rose, and with them his natural sense of fun.

"Pretty comfortable up here, Ance."

"I'll make you comfortable right soon," said the man. "Wait till I git a few stones."

Paul laughed, but did not altogether like it. "Fire away," he said, boldly. A small stone went by his head, then another, and at last one barked his shin. It hurt, but he only said, "You're a mean cuss, Ance Vickers, to stone a boy. Wait till I tell Phil Richmond what I heard you say to Myry." He had no idea of telling, but the situation was grave. The next moment he regretted the indiscretion.

"You won't never tell on me," returned Ance. "I'm comin' up to finish you. This here joke's lasted jus' long 'nough. You'd best say your prayers."

Paul trembled, but climbed higher.

"It's no use. I'll git you." The angry man tore off his coat, pulled off his long boots, and began with dreadful ease to climb the tree.

Paul called a truce. "If I come down, what will you do?"

"Kill you, by ——!" said the man, brutally. "I won't have no tales told on me."

How far the lumberman was in earnest, and how far merely disposed to frighten him, Paul could not know. Ance had a bad record as a man rather merciless when excited with anger and whiskey. Just now the lad's threat had alarmed and irritated him, and, while Paul may have overestimated Ance's desire for cruel vengeance, it is pretty sure that the man's sense of accumulated

wrong left him little self-control. Terrified, Paul climbed higher, and at last crawled out on a large limb almost as far as he dared to go. Ance, now silent, was within ten feet of him, and began also with a good deal of caution to follow the boy, his greater height enabling the man to stand on a lower branch and thus to distribute his weight as he moved, hand beyond hand, towards the boy. Meanwhile, Paul was edging along on top of his limb, fiercely gripping it with legs and arms. At last Ance was too far out to keep safe footing on the branch below him. The limb above was cracking with the double weight. Both were silent, but very warily the man inch by inch came nearer. "You'll kill us both," said Paul. "It won't hold." Ance said nothing. Paul let go with one hand, got a penknife out of his pocket, opened it with his teeth, and said, "If you come nearer, I'll cut your hand." "Cut away," cried Ance. The boy raised his arm: the red hairy hand was almost within touch of him. At this moment a loud voice rang out below.

"Halloo! what's all this about? Let that boy alone, I say." Ance looked down. The tall form and blond moustache of John Riverius were visible through the swaying leafage.

"Not till I ketch him," cried Ance. "You ain't the man to stop Ance Vickers."

Riverius took in the danger of the situation in a moment.

"Der Teufel!" he cried. The sharp double click of the cock was heard distinctly. "I've got

you covered," he cried, as he raised his rifle. "As surely as I live, you are a lost man if you are not down out of that tree in a minute."

Ance lost no time. There was deadly earnestness in the voice of Riverius. "I'll come," said Ance, and proceeded to descend, followed by the boy, now pale and shaking from the effects of immense physical exertion and mental strain. Ance set his back to the tree and folded his arms as Paul swung out on a lower branch and dropped beside his protector.

"What's all this about?" said Riverius.

"Ask him," returned Ance, sullenly. "I won't forget either one of you. You look out. That's all."

"Pshaw!" said Riverius. "I can take care of myself and of him too. Mein Gott, what a beast you must be to bully a boy like that!"

"Rifles talk big," said Ance.

The German turned, set the rifle against a tree back of him, half cocking it as he did so, threw off his coat quietly, and turned.

"Now, my man, the rifle's done talking. What next?"

"Oh, don't!" said Paul. "He'll kill you. He's the best wrestler on the river. Oh, please don't! I'll let him lick me."

"Stuff!" said Riverius. Then, to the surprise of both, Ance replied, "I ain't got no quarrel with you, Ryverus. You jus' go your way, an' I'll go mine."

Assuredly the man was not afraid. What Paul

had said of his reputation for strength and skill was true; but Ance was still conscious of the enervating influence of liquor, was tired from his run, and had in mind also certain prudential considerations as to how his quasi-friend Philetus would like the matter. Moreover, he dully reflected that most probably the scared boy would confine himself to the hornet matter, and that on the whole it was better to bide his time. He muttered under his breath, "Hurt dogs has got long mem'ries," and walked slowly away.

"Come, now, Paul," said Riverius, picking up coat and rifle, "what new scrape have you been in? This looks a little serious. Let's have it out."

"Yes, I want to tell; but wait a little, till I get the eggs," said the boy. "I am awfully blown."

"I will go with you," returned his companion. The basket was found, and again they turned homeward. The elder person had considerately waited to give the lad time to recover his equanimity. Now he repeated his query as he sat down on a log, while Paul, glad of a rest, threw himself on the moss at his feet.

"When I got to Myry Richmond's, there was Ance Vickers. Well, he allowed he was going to take a shingle to me."

"Oh, but what about?"

"He said I sassed him."

"Were saucy, I suppose you mean."

"Oh, you're worse than mother, Mr. Riverius. Well, maybe I was saucy."

"What about?"

The boy reflected. He was not to tell Philetus, but this was different. He paused.

"Himmel! can't you tell it out like a man?"

"He was impudent to Miriam, and I told him to clear out. You know he comes after Phil and gets him to drink, and Myry was pretty mad."

"I see."

"I said I wouldn't tell Philetus; and you won't, will you? You see, I said I wouldn't."

"Who asked you?—Miriam?"

"Yes."

"Ach, bad, bad! What next comes?"

Then Paul, a little in doubt, related the hornet business. The fun of it was too much for John Riverius, and he laughed till he ached. "And so he treed you, did he? And are you sorry?"

Paul glanced up at the shrewd clean-cut face and yellow moustache. It was perfectly in control, and gave no counsel to the alert young physiognomist.

"Sorry? No, I'm not. I'm sorry I got you in a row with that blackguard. He couldn't have caught me. I would have cut his hand."

"I don't like knives."

"No, sir, I know; but I couldn't help it, now, could I?"

"I suppose not." And Riverius arose and began thoughtfully to walk to and fro.

"There will come mischief out of this, Paul, and your mother has had more than her share of trouble." Paul was silent. He began to think that there might be several sides to this question.

"I'll make it up with Ance," he said, at last.

"No, better to leave it to me, and say nothing to your mother."

"All right, sir." It would be set straight if John Riverius took it in hand; and with this consoling reflection Paul put it out of his mind in a few days, or recalled it only to remember with mirth the hornet dance of bow-legged Ance.

CHAPTER VI.

Two or three days passed, during which Riverius sought in vain for a chance to talk with Vickers. Then he went away down the river to Pittsburg, and was gone two weeks. He reappeared at supper one evening, and after it went over to his cabin, and, coming back, put an envelope on the table. "You will find within the account for my board, Mrs. Preston."

"Thank you," she said. This monthly bit of business unaccountably annoyed her. She put the envelope in her pocket, adding, "You are a very easy boarder."

"Am I, indeed? I eat like a cormorant. I come, I go. You must be very tired of so erratic a guest, and you put my account in your pocket without a look at it. It is hardly business-like. These woodmen all cheat you about your pines." Riverius had a faint sense of mischievous pleasure in dwelling on their mutual commercial relations.

"This is not business at all," Bessy returned, quite earnestly. "You pay me by the month and are here one week out of three."

"So much the worse for me. How quiet the time is! Will you walk with me a little in the woods?" It was the first time he had made any such request, but of late he had acquired the habit of sitting with her after meals while he smoked,

and now and then he had picked up a book and read aloud,—usually after Paul had gone to bed.

"I shall be glad to go, if you will not discuss money matters. I hate them," she answered; and they strolled away, leaving Paul deep in a volume of travel. They walked on in silence for a while, following in the twilight a disused ox-road.

"How wordless we are!" he said.

"Yes. There may be many reasons for that. One may have nothing to say."

"Or too much." As he spoke she glanced at him curiously.

"That is not my case, at least," she returned. "I am undergoing mental desiccation." "Certainly not physical," thought her companion, pleasantly conscious of her look of easy strength and bloom. He laughed. "What amuses you?" she asked.

"Oh, little. When one is happy and the world goes well, a small thing makes merry. We are at the windfall." As he spoke, they turned aside into the dusking forest.

"Sit here," he said. As she sat on the huge fallen moss-clad tree, it yielded beneath her weight, a rotten shell of mouldered ruin. He caught her hand, and, laughing, lifted her quickly as a dusty powder of utterly dried-up and decayed wood rose in the air. "This is better," he said, as they found seats on a firmer log.

"What a strange ruin, and how grim and solemn!" Perhaps a century back some fierce cyclone had swept as with a giant scythe through a mile of forest and left behind it a lane of tumbled

trees, a hundred yards in breadth. On either side rose, tall and wholesome, a wall of great pines, emphasizing with their vigorous lines the wreck between, where, one on another, lay long and massive trunks so clad with moss and beset with ferns as to look like monstrous grave-heaps in the fading light.

"They are but as spectres of things long dead," he said. "At a touch they fall and are dust. I would I could have seen it done. Think what a sight it must have been. A battle is a poor human trifle to that."

"You have seen battles?"

"Yes; they are small affairs, compared to this riot of destruction."

"How sad it is! I have been here often, and always it seems to me each time more solemn." Then they were still so long that Bessy, of a sudden reflecting on the fact, recognized in it the gathering nearness of friendly relation which made silence possible. At last he said,—

"You forbade me to discuss business, but I want to tell you that I have been thinking of building a mill on your brook, if you will let me have land enough."

"Why not? Take all you need."

"That is for you to say. It will be of great use to you, to me, and indeed to all about here. I think I will ask Philetus and Consider to take charge of it. How would it do to sound Miriam first? For some reason, the old fellow does not like me; and yet I should be glad to help him."

"You laugh at his talk too much."

"But he is so absurd."

"That is true; yet why should you care? He is practical enough as to all business matters."

"Then you think well of my scheme? I will see his wife to-morrow."

"Perhaps that might be best," she said, thoughtfully.

"Why perhaps?"

"I hardly know. I—yes, on the whole, that may be the better plan. He is a strange man. At times he seems to me quite unreasonable,—really odd, you know." With a woman's ready intuition, she had begun to suspect that Philetus disliked Miriam's frank admiration of the German.

"Well, I will see her to-morrow and talk to you afterwards. Has Paul told you of his trouble with Ance Vickers?"

"No. Nothing serious, I trust?"

"Oh, not very. How close-mouthed the lad can be!" Then he gave her an account of Paul's mischief, leaving out as much of Miriam's share as was possible.

"I do not like it," she said.

"No, nor I; but boys will be boys, and the mood of mischief does not last. I will see Ance and try to settle the matter."

"You will be a good friend, as you always are. I will leave it to you."

"Thank you."

"And now for your reward." And she laughed while he set curious eyes on her face.

"What is it?"

"Guess."

"I cannot, unless it is that you will sit an hour longer."

"Oh, no, no," she said, rising. "It is time to go home."

"But my reward."

"Which hand will you choose?" she cried, smiling and light of heart.

"The left,—no, the right."

"You are lucky." And she dropped a large ring into his palm.

"Where found you that? It was my grandfather's. The Elector gave it to his grandfather. I lost it in the drifts that night when I pulled off my gloves to tie my snow-shoe."

"I found it to-day by the fence."

"Ach! always it is you who give."

"That is forbidden talk."

He slipped the ring on his thumb, after the German fashion. "Thank you," he said, and put out his hand. She gave him hers. He was minded to kiss it, but hesitated, and now the chance was past, and they turned and walked homeward, leaving the windfall behind them to the gathering shadows.

The next day Riverius strolled across the woods to carry out his plan. Now and then he looked down at his ring, or, pausing, gathered a flower and studied it for a few minutes. Then he began to think over what he should say to Miriam. She amused him, and he liked her society better than that of the men about them. On the way he met

Ance Vickers, and quietly stopped to talk to him and to ask a question as to the path. The man was, as usual, the worse for liquor,—a thing which always more or less irritated the German, who, looking forth out of the too proudly governed kingdom of his own nature, allowed little for the lower planes of other men's lives and despised the mob-rule of ungoverned passions. Ance was leaning on his axe-blade and looking about him as he sat on the slope above the brook.

"Good-morning, Ance," said Riverius, recognizing his own feeling of annoyance, but desiring to control it in Paul's interests.

"Mornin'," returned Ance, without looking up.

"I have been wanting to see you about Mrs. Preston's boy. I don't think he meant to do more than just such mischief as boys will do."

"Well, he done it."

"Yes, of course; but really it is hardly a matter for malice. Why should a great fellow like you care to keep a lad scared? You punished him quite enough."

"So you think and I don't."

"But there's his mother."

"Oh, his mother. That's the trouble, is it? Let her lick him well, and I'll quit thinkin' about the brat."

Riverius was now much more than annoyed, but, seeing how useless it was to talk to Ance in his present condition, made no direct reply, and merely asked, "Which is the nearer way to Richmond's?"

"The trail's plain enough," said Ance, roughly.

"I asked you a civil question," returned Riverius. "Why can't you answer civilly?"

"A child might see. You go on straight to the brook. Philetus is there, eatin'. Guess he'll tell you."

"I suppose you have both been drinking, or you would have more decent manners."

"What's that your business?"

"Why do you make that poor old fellow take liquor?"

"What makes you go over to see that ther' wife of his'n?"

Riverius laughed, despite his sense of rising wrath. "You'll get into trouble, my man, if you don't keep a little better guard on your tongue."

"That's where you'll git, I guess."

"Pshaw!" said Riverius, controlling his anger, and walked away biting his long moustache. Presently he came upon Philetus, and at once saw that he had been sharing the other woodman's flask. Such indulgence at first made him either merry or contemplative, but soon or late suspicious and cross-grained. He was eating his mid-day meal by the brook. His quick ear detected the step.

"Good-morning," said the German. "I wanted to see you."

"Well, I'm here and you're here."

"And I suppose Consider isn't far away, Philetus."

"No, sir; a man's got to keep his eyes near to hand. Not that I needs 'em much, but I smelt a bear pretty nigh this mornin', and bears wants eyes

until you come to close quarters, then they ain't no good."

"I like best to look at them over the sight of a rifle."

"'Tain't a fair thing, nuther, Mr. Ryverus. I've often took notice of that sence I went blind. We're awful mean fighters, men air. The devil he's a lot fairer; he jus' runs in on you, and it's a squar' rough-and-tumble. I've had times with him,—times; 'twasn't hypocrisy done it. That ain't my failin'. That gits you in the teeth. Manuel Swedenborg says so. Anyways, some devil's got my eyes, cause maybe they wasn't the Lord's servers."

Riverius listened, and at the close was silent a moment. Vagueness was most unpleasant to him. He said, abruptly,—

"What are you and Vickers doing here?"

"God's work," he answered. He was in one of the curious moods which a little drink and his own nature were apt to create.

"Well, just what kind?"

"Seein' whar Ike Rollins kin put a mill on this brook. Perhaps you're a-guessin' as that ain't God's work."

"Why not? It is all his work."

"There's ways and ways," urged Phil, keenly disposed for discussion; but the German diverged, a little bored, and desirous to be on his way again.

"Isn't this Mrs. Preston's land?"

"Yes, and a good mill-site, too. Quite a nat'ral dam, and handy to the river."

"What will Rollins want to give her?"

"I don't know, rightly. He kind of left it to me and her."

"Then it's not settled yet?"

"No."

"What is the way to your house, Richmond?"

"Goin' thar, are you? Well, ye're a bit off. It's 'stonishin' how you city folks git to lose yourselves in a clean wood. Two miles off, you air. Foller the brook a mile, and take a ox-road to left. What's goin' on now?"

"Nothing of moment. I am going to see your wife."

"Well, that's the way." He was wondering why a man should go to see another man's wife with no object in view which he seemed to care to state.

"By the bye, Mrs. Richmond will tell you my errand when you see her. You will be pleased, I think. Good-by."

The woodman rose and heard his retreating steps. "I'd give a lot fur to see that 'ere man's face. Then I'd know. Ther's things goin' on, goin' on—— Oh, Lord, fur to see!"

As Riverius approached Richmond's cabin he came upon the child. "Halloo, kitten," he said, mounting the young Ophelia on his broad shoulder, "here's a box of sugar-plums from the big town."

"I love you. What makes you cut your hair so short? Phely can't hold on."

"For beauty, kitten. Our affection is mutual. Where's mother?"

"Here," said Miriam's strong voice. "Come in."

"Glad to see you," he said. He was more easily familiar with her than with her friend.

"Did you see my Phil, Mr. Riverius? He wasn't home last night." She tried to say it steadily, but her voice fell.

"Yes; I met him at the run. He was with Vickers."

"Ah, I understand. I thought that man was down Olean way. You won't mind, sir, but—but—had Phil been drinking?"

"Yes, Mrs. Richmond."

"Couldn't you speak to him?"

"I will; but Mrs. Preston has much more power to influence him than I."

"I know; that's so; but she's tried and I've tried." Miriam well knew that Philetus disliked Riverius, but scarcely why.

"If Phil only just had some steady work, but he's here and he's there. You know how it is; and the logging-camps are just too awful."

"I came over to ask you about something which may help you. I think of buying a hundred acres along the run and building a saw-mill. That would give Mrs. Preston a little money, at say ten dollars an acre."

"Oh, it isn't worth it."

"Yes; it's the only mill-site for five miles round."

"Phil won't like that," she said, abruptly.

"And why not?"

"He's promised it in a way to Rollins."

"Promised it!" said Riverius, haughtily. "It

is not his. How could he? And why won't he like it?"

She colored slightly. "Well, he won't. He won't like your coming in and bidding over Rollins; and Rollins won't, either, for that matter."

"That matters little to me. What I want is to put Phil and his deaf friend in charge to run it. I will give good wages and steady employment. That will keep him clear of Ance. Now suppose you were to speak to Phil. If I talk to Mrs. Preston at once——"

"Did Phil speak of it?—about Rollins, I mean?" she broke in.

"Yes."

"Then he won't like it. I'll try; but he won't like it. He's a man stands by his word, drunk or sober." She spoke with a certain pride. "I'll speak to him, anyway. It would keep him a heap from home."

"Yes; that cannot be helped."

Meanwhile, the fair Ophelia had been exhausting her devices to attract his notice. She tapped his knee, looked up at his face, tried the lure of peeping round a chair, and at last, in the pause at the close of his last words, said, "I don't love you."

"Daughter of Eve!" he cried, laughing. "I must go." Yet he stayed on, playing like an older child with the little maid, showing her his watch, which opened when she blew on it, and doing simple conjuring tricks to her vast delight.

"You ought to have young ones of your own, Mr. Riverius," said the happy, handsome mother.

"Ach!" he laughed, "not till I can get as handsome a mother."

"Looks are not much good up here," she said, "and with a blind husband, too."

"He's got ears, though," said Philetus at the door. Whether or not he had heard the German's frank compliment could not be said, but Riverius promptly answered, "You've got the handsomest wife on the Alleghany, Philetus, and she the best-looking man."

"We're very well," returned the giant, rather shortly. "Will you bide?"

"No; Mrs. Richmond knows my errand. She will tell you."

"I thought you hadn't no errand."

"I did not say so."

"I kinder so took it."

"You mustn't mind Phil," she said, as Riverius passed by her at the door-way. He nodded, smiling, and heard the small Ophelia's voice, "You come back soon."

A day or two later, Philetus, quite sober, came over and sat in Riverius's cabin. "I've come 'bout that 'ere mill. Seem's you'd fixed it with Madam. I'll come, and Consider will come too. Will you take Ance Vickers?"

"Himmel! not I," said Riverius.

"I knowed you wouldn't. I ain't spoke none to him about it. But Rollins he's that mad; says you bought in afore him."

"Tell him to go to der Teufel."

"I ain't clear whar that may be. I'd a bit ruther him and his loggin'-gang was in with you."

"Not if I can help it. They are the worst lot from here to Olean."

"He's pizin mad."

"Stuff! Go on and build the mill; but no Ance Vickers."

"All right: you knows yer business. Nex' time you want to talk, Mr. Ryverus, you talk at me. I ain't deef, and there ain't no call to be counsellin' with women. You'll find me at the mill,—allus at the mill." The offer was, in fact, too good to reject; and Miriam had not been without influence. He left the German mildly puzzled, but clear at least that his visits to Miriam were not to her husband's mind,—why he could not tell. Ance might have enlightened him; yet the notion of jealousy on the part of the blind man would have merely amused him.

The mill was built, and the summer glided on to its close. Late in September the money was to be paid to Mrs. Preston. There had been some trouble as to that, until she heard how much the disappointed Rollins would have been willing to give, and then it seemed natural enough. Riverius had been over to Olean and returned.

"In the house; mother's in the house," said Paul.

"I've brought you a rifle, Paul. Come over this evening and get it. Come late. I have letters to write." Then he went in.

Mrs. Preston had a bowl in her lap, and was peeling potatoes. To his surprise, she wore a pair of faded gloves.

"Come in," she said. He had paused at the door, watching her a moment. Whatever she did had a dexterous grace which gave pleasure to see. "I wish you would finish those laurels," she said. "I was half tempted to try myself, only your box is in your cabin, and——"

"I will leave it here. Can you paint? You never told me."

"Yes, a little,—not very well. I used to once. I will try to-morrow."

"Perhaps you may like a lesson. Oh! and here is a bank-book. You see you are credited with a thousand dollars in the Olean Bank."

She took it, somewhat embarrassed. It was as though he was giving her something. "Thank you," she said.

"No need to. It is a pure matter of business. I am the gainer." And he smiled. "I see you have done the potatoes. Suppose I bring the paints now. The light is good."

In a few moments they were standing on two chairs by the fireplace, with Paul on one side, holding the color-case. "You paint well," he said. "What a pity we had not the laurels! How glorious they are! Can you reach the upper spray? A little more purple. That's it. Take care!" As she reached up, the chair tilted, and but for his quick stay of her waist she would have fallen.

"Thank you," she said, flushing. "I think that will do for to-day." And at once she descended. The touch troubled her. "Why did you let go the chair, Paul?" she exclaimed, irritably.

Riverius looked puzzled. "We will finish tomorrow," he said, but they did not. Mrs. Preston said it was perhaps better for him to go on with the roses. They were still in bloom here and there. When the laurels came back they could do them, if Mr. Riverius chanced to be on the Alleghany, next spring.

The day after he spent the morning over the birch-bark panels, working with swiftness and evident pleasure, while without Mrs. Preston sat below the eaves, where the narrowing shadow now and then caused her to rise and set her chair farther back. Paul was cleaning the new rifle, certainly for the second time that day. His mother looked up from her sewing and back athwart the clearing to the sparks of silver which shot through the leafage from the shining river. The stumps in the foreground were blackened by fire, or mouldering, moss-clad and lichen-tinted. She reflected that they were like material memories of things once beautiful. Why should they be ugly and unpleasant? By and by these mouldering memories would die. Around them the violets had been in June, and then the daisies, and now asters. The train of reflection had the sweet vagueness of the half-linked thoughts and fancies which should be, nay, are, the gentle privilege of the woman who sits nigh the sunshine within scent of pine and spruce, the fingers busy, the mind taking holiday from moment to moment. She was happy and knew it. Why was she yielding to half-morbid fancies? All memories must fade. Life itself is one long mem-

ory. That, too, will fade. Yet there was some luxury in the melancholy fancies. She saw faintly that once she had been so sad that she had not dared to drift in thought. Stern repression had been the needful rule of her life, for she had had a deadly fear of morbid yieldings and instinctively cherished what hope or zest was left in life. But now, yes, she was happy, and had no need to coerce her wayward, dreamy moods. She could afford the luxury of melancholy. Almost she could afford to go backward and calmly consider the joy, and the fading of it, and even Paul the father. No, not yet. There would come a time when she could do this thing and must. She fairly well understood Bessy Preston, and was quite honest in her self-dealings. Some memorial debts gather awful usury; others are mysteriously settled by time.

"Paul, you treat that gun like a baby," she cried.

He looked up, well pleased. "Oh, he's the nicest man I just ever——"

She shook her head, put a finger on her lips, and then pointed to the cabin, whence came suddenly the words,—

"Ach, das ist schön. I have finished the laurels. Will not you enter and observe?"

She gathered up her work, and, smiling, went in. "Thank you. How exquisite! You have retouched my work. How much better it looks!"

"No, I let it alone. I am quite honest to say it is good. Where does mine end, and where is yours?"

"There,—just there."

"No." And he laughed merrily. "No, we do never know where one's work begins and where one other's joins it. That is so of life. Ach, I get mystic, as is our friend Philetus; and that puts in my mind to say that I would like to take Paul up the river. They are going to try to break the great jam which is now from last April." He always asked leave in his proud, courteous way when he desired to have Paul with him,—which was often. At times she said no. The boy's hours of lessons, at which she worked harder than Paul himself, were resolutely to be adhered to, and she was as firm in regard to what Riverius asked as she would have been with any less friendly person. He never urged or repeated a request, and took yes or no with quiet acceptance.

"If he will get double lessons to-morrow, he may go. I suppose it will be an interesting thing to see."

"Yes, and there are logs of yours and of mine in the jam. Philetus and Kinsman will be there to help, and I suppose that fellow Rollins and his men. It will be well worthy to see. Wherefore will you not also go?"

She hesitated, and by this time Paul had joined them and given very eagerly the required pledge. "Oh, do go, mother!" he said. "We will take you up in the dug-out. You needn't be the least afraid," he added, seriously. "Mr. Riverius he can pole right well. You never will let me pole you, and Phil says I'll be as good as Ike Rollins before long. Do come."

She said she would go. Of late her youthful

enterprise was returning, and a more wholesome curiosity, which for a long while had seemed to be utterly dead.

"Then we will lunch on the way," said Paul. "We can't lose any time. I know the key to that jam. I was all over it last week." Riverius smiled at the lad's little display. The jam was the worst known for years, and had defied thus far the skill of the oldest lumbermen. Another year would make it serious, and the accumulation of spring logs would add to the difficulty. "We may have to walk back, mother. If it breaks, the river will be dangerous."

"I can walk," she said. "It is not over five or six miles."

"Yes, and mostly ox-roads." The boy ran about, hastened Becky, and was perched on the fence with his basket and the rifle before Riverius and Mrs. Preston were ready. Then he shouted, "I'll bale her out," and was off down the slope to the swift river.

CHAPTER VII.

PRESENTLY Riverius and Mrs. Preston joined Paul at the river. Twigs, ferns, and dry moss were put in the bottom of the long dug-out. Mrs. Preston sat down in the middle. They pushed carefully out a few yards from shore. It was not her first experience of a pirogue or dug-out, but in her days of sorrow and anxiety she had often felt on the verge of nervousness and hesitated with a timidity not natural to her to put herself where her nerves might be tried. Now she recognized with joy that she had recovered her youthful freedom from fear and could simply give herself up to the happiness of an idle hour. Idle it was and happy. A dug-out, or, as it is at times called in Maine, a pirogue, is merely a long log hollowed out by the axe and sharpened at stem and stern. There is no keel, and the inexperienced man who can even stand up in it when afloat must be rare, so that a lumberman is apt to say, "Got to be born in a py-rogue, and not squint none, and git your hair parted in the middle." But two skilful polesmen upright at bow and stern in this frail vessel is as pretty a sight as can be seen. And now the woman watched with pleasure the alert lad in the bow, heard the quick click of the ash-poles against the sides of the boat, and saw the water whirl by as with rhythmic precision the gleaming poles struck

on the bottom and drove the rocking dug-out up the stream. Hand over hand they were brought forward swiftly amid rapid words from bow to stern. "To left, Paul. Swing her. Round the rock. Quick, look out. That's it. Snub her, snub her, Paul. Now let her have it." On either side the hills rose, as yet little scathed by the axe, but touched here and there with anticipative autumn tints. Pines, black and white birches, cherry, poplar, a great and glorious show of nature's varied handiwork, fled by as it were in moving, shifting masses. How delicious it was, the faint sense of peril, the assurance of security in the slim well-built figure in the bow, sharply conning the river ahead, decisive and with a proud look of responsibility in his strong young face! The thought came over her that, whatever might be his lot,—and she by no means meant these woods to be its limit,—the present education in limb and mind was of the best for his years.

Riverius had taken kindly to the river ways, but he was as yet far less skilful than the young bowman, although his greater power was felt in the energy imparted to each forward dart of the boat as the rattling iron-shod poles struck the rocky bottom. About two miles up they turned aside to avoid a deep current, and passed into comparatively shallow water, around an island skirted with willows and thickly wooded with hickories and the gum-tree, already kindling with prophecy of the glories of October. The water was quick and the rapids somewhat turbulent. "Now look sharp, mother,"

said Paul, "and sit still. This is the worst." Of a sudden the canoe was checked short midway in its powerfully-urged upward course. Riverius cried, "Hold her, hard, hard," and there was a splash behind Bessy Preston, scarce heard amidst the watery tumult, whilst the dug-out rocked dangerously. She saw Paul holding the boat with all his force, the pole quivering in the fierce rush of water. She knew at once, with a little scare, that they had narrowly escaped going over. She did not stir, having the rare faculty of growing calm in danger. "What is it, Paul?" she said. He did not reply: he was looking anxiously astern. "All right," said a voice, a little distant. "Drop her carefully." Paul's face lit up, and almost foot by foot he let the dug-out drop back, saying, as he did so, "He's all right. Caught his pole." Then, as they floated into quieter water, "Oh, mother! there isn't a man on the Alleghany would have dared to do that. Glad I was looking back."

"What was he doing, Paul? Is he safe?"

"Oh, yes, he's safe. Why, just at the end of the push, mother, your pole is apt to catch between rocks; and if you hold on you go over, and the boat too. You must let the pole go. You see, he isn't quite up to it; and so when he held on a bit too long, and he knew what was coming, he just fell backwards out of the dug-out quietly, and, mother, he never looked behind him. If he had hit a rock he might have been killed."

"Ah," she said, "I see."

By this time Riverius was ashore, laughing, and

wringing out his moustache, and shaking himself like a great Newfoundland.

"You have cut your head," said Mrs. Preston.

"Yes; I could not see back of me. It will stop bleeding in a moment. Find me a dry puff-ball, Paul." The boy came back with it and watched Riverius crush it and finally bind it on his temple with his handkerchief. "I picked up the pole," said Paul. He said nothing of the little feat, one which few boatmen care to practise in a rocky rapid.[1] He had learned that personal allusions or expressions of his boy hero-worship were ungraciously received, and Mrs. Preston spoke only a few words of question. Wet clothes and a cut head were small affairs in the woods, and perhaps also she did not quite as fully realize as did Paul either the quick unselfish courage or the great risk of the adventure. They pushed out anew, Riverius saying, "Shall you have any fear? I was clumsy."

"I? Certainly not."

However, they took another channel, and Riverius was pretty dry when they came near the jam. The boat was pulled far up into the wood and tied to a tree. Then they followed a trail along shore, climbed up through alder thickets and sturdy laurel-bushes, and at last found themselves on a bluff some thirty feet above the stream. Here were Philetus, Consider Kinsman, and Anson Vickers. Rollins and a dozen or two of his wood-gang were busy coiling and untangling ropes. Axes and log-hooks

[1] The author has seen it done on just such an occasion.

lay about, and the men in high hob-nailed boots and the universal red shirt were moving to and fro. Then there was a consultation between Philetus, Consider, Vickers, and a few others. There was much talk and some difference of opinion. As the new-comers joined the group, Consider turned and pulled Philetus's sleeve.

"It's the Madam, and Ryverus, and Paul. Ryverus he's had a wettin'. He couldn't of fell out of the dug-out: he'd of upsot her. Never knowed a furriner any good in a canoe."

Rollins nodded in a familiar way.

"What's the difficulty?" said the German, moving up to the group.

"Guess the same there was always," returned Rollins.

"It don't sway none," said Consider. "It's the wust jam I ever see."

"Has any one been out on it lately?" asked Riverius, taking no apparent notice of Rollins's abrupt manner. He knew how these jams change.

"Ben on it?" replied Rollins. "I've lived on it, almost. Ain't I got five thousand logs in it, clean marked all, and a heap of 'em water-soaked?"

"There's two keys to that 'ere jam," said Consider.

"No, there ain't; there's one," returned Vickers, "and a bad one. Seed it yesterday."

"Where is it?" said Paul, incautiously.

"Don't you go to speak to yer betters," replied Ance, sharply.

"My betters?"

"Come here," called Mrs. Preston. "Now keep quiet. This is not a boy's business."

"But I know where the key is."

"Keep quiet. Do you hear me?"

He was silent.

Rollins grinned, and the German drew himself up.

"Well, it's settled at last," said Rollins. "Ance will go down on the jam. Some of you will carry a rope to him. Here, get the end through the pulleys. Now stir around. When Ance sings out, 'Pull,' let her have it. Here, two of you cross, and two stay below by yon pine. Once it starts, keep 'em a-goin', and look smart for broken legs."

Riverius took out a field-glass and began to survey the great jam. For a half-mile above where they stood, the narrowed stream was partially dammed by an inconceivably confused mass of vast brown logs. The force of the wild rush of water, now at rather unusual height of flood from recent rains, was seen in an occasional heave of some great trunk or heard in numberless creaking, crunching sounds. Here and there at times a spurt of yellow water shot in air. Now and then there were, at places chiefly midway in the jam, local disturbances, logs rolling over one another, and then quiet, as the vast energies at work in the pent-up river reached the limit of their power to crush or compress the tangle of logs. Lower down the shore, great tree-trunks standing at every conceivable angle, or piled one on the other, so

weighted the accumulated mass as to make in many places an almost solid dam, through which the prisoned water struggled, or over which it dashed high in sheets of amber-yellow foam loaded with the ground bark from this huge crush of chafed and grinding pines. A good deal of timber had by degrees been started from the lower end of the blockade, and thousands of logs of black birch, pine, cherry, and hickory sent adrift, to be gathered at the booms far below. But above the point now in question there was a vast, almost motionless, tangle of pines. Somewhere in it was the key, as the lumbermen call it. There might be but one, there might be several; and the decision as to this point is in a measure experimental. As to the present case, it was possible that the single key of the jam was at the place where Ance had decided it to be, some thirty feet above the lower limit of the anchored mass. Here an uprooted pine with most of its great limbs still whole had become in some way arrested, its weighted roots being firmly stayed against the underlying rocks and its top looking up stream. Against its first strong limb a cut pine log of unusual size and length had caught, and, forced down by the current and cumbered by gathering logs, had also been weighted down to the bottom. Thus the two made an angle, and on and about them other logs had caught, and, with uprooted saplings and trunks great and small, had made a firm barrier. This was continually strengthened by arriving masses of timber, which, driven down, heaved up, and crossed in wild con-

fusion, had at last blocked the entire stream. Of course there were within the crush of logs a multitude of lesser keys; but, the mass once started by rupture of one of its greater stays, it was possible that the smaller anchors would be torn loose in the violent rush of the unprisoned waters.

Opinions varied as to whether Ance was correct. At all events, the work was to be done from below. With this obstacle cleared away, they would know if, as Ance contended, it was the main key to the jam. He sat down, looked to see if the great nails in his boots were sharp, rose up, and, tightening his belt, took an axe, felt its edge, and walked away on what he well knew to be an errand of immense danger. Riverius turned to Paul.

"I am going on to the jam above, to see if Consider is right."

"I wouldn't, sir," said Paul. He well knew the risk.

"Oh, there is time enough. Just fire your rifle when they begin. I will not go far."

Mrs. Preston was about to speak, but he was now walking away, and she hesitated to call after him,—she hardly knew why.

"Paul's got to look sharp," Rollins had said. "There won't be much time to lose." Paul capped his rifle and stood ready, not liking it, and anxiously following with his eyes the retreating figure. Meanwhile, Ance alertly leaped from log to log, conscious that all eyes were on him. Then, looking up, he shouted, "It's sprung a bit here sence yesterday." The men following with a rope

collected about him. Then one climbed the great pine log and as far up as possible knotted it securely on the end of the rough trunk. "Ready!" cried Ance. Gradually the gang on the bluff a little lower down the stream tightened the rope, the pulleys creaking, while the men on the jam made rapidly for the shore. Ance looked up, and, leaning over, struck blow on blow below the waterline. At last he cried, "Now let her have it," and stepped back. The huge trunk, released, sprang forward violently, aided by the pull of a score of vigorous men on the bluff. "Quick, Ance!" they called. "He's done it. Quick! Go it, Ance!" The woodman leaped from log to log, won the safer shore, caught at branch and tree-trunk, and swung himself breathless to the bluff top. "Knowed I'd do it," he said.

As Ance took his station on the jam, Paul raised his rifle, lowered it as the first axe-blow rang on the jam below, and cried out, in terror, "I've dropped the cap!"

"Run, run!" said his mother. "Run up the bank! run!" Paul shot away at the word, and Mrs. Preston turned to Rollins.

"Mr. Riverius is on the jam above. Call to Ance to wait. Please do, and quickly;" for the axe-blows fell now to right, now to left. "Stop the men. Don't let them pull."

Rollins said, "It's too late. Guess he'll git off. Got as good a show as Ance, anyway," and then, in a lower voice, to the men at the rope, "Some folks is awful valuable."

Bessy Preston heard, and, hearing, flushed. She turned aside a moment to hide her risen color. Some flush from the head, some from the heart. She did not ask now whence came the red signal, but found it impossible to speak again to Rollins. The sneer was coarse, and struck like a base bludgeon. She took it proudly, not answering as the sallow round-shouldered man would have wished. To say a word more was not so much to humble herself as to humble Riverius. She had caught the faint grin on those stolid faces. It seemed but a jest of peril to them, and how they took Rollins's words was plain. "He must abide it," she muttered, instinctively realizing the German's pride and his dislike of obligation. The next moment, with a prayer of thankfulness, she saw him on the bluff a hundred yards beyond, with Paul at his side. He had failed to find an easy access to the place he desired to reach, and, rightly guessing that he would be given scant time, and hearing no shot, had turned back from almost certain death. Never more than at that moment had Bessy Preston felt glad of the temperament which grew calm in peril. Never before had she been so tested. For a moment she had had the wild impulse to appeal to the men. It would have answered; she knew her power; but the price,—the price! Now she turned to look, at ease for the time. The great pine log bent over, the men hauled fiercely, slacked the rope and hauled again, aiding it as it sprang towards them. Of a sudden the vast stem of pine, feeling the immense pressure,

gave way, the pulling gang of men rolled laughing on the ground, and instantly the nearer logs broke loose. Then there was a pause, a strange stir, far and near, sounds of fierce jostle, crush and grind, and at last a sudden and violent commotion as the whole mass of huge logs broke up and began to sweep by with indescribable tumult, now stayed a second, now off again. The physical consequences of the gigantic forces set free were such as none could predict. Amidst roar and crash and crunch and strange shrieking grinding notes of the fury of intense frictions, a forest of logs fled past. Trunks forty feet long shot out here and there, straight up in air, and fell shattered on the mass below them. White and yellow jets of tortured water dashed up to half the height of the bluff from a churned mass of foam thick and spumy with the shed sap and ground bark. With destructive fury the great whirling logs smote the shores and swept as with a scythe the trees along the banks, and so with the dead and living things of the wood fled madly downward, carrying ruin to left and right.

After one wild hurrah, even the loggers rested silent on their axe-helves or log-hooks. The terror or sublimity of the sight held Elizabeth Preston breathless, and for the time did her good service by dwarfing or overpowering all other feelings. Then she heard Rollins remark, "There's a lot of them logs busted, and mostly mine's in the thick of it." Philetus stood intensely realizing through his hearing alone the well-known thing he could

not see, and by his side Consider Kinsman, hearing nothing, was at intervals describing in his habitual way the chaotic scene. "Jerusher, but there's a log went nigh thirty feet out of water. Busted, by George! Never seed nothin' like it." And he pulled his friend's ear gently, as a conventional sign of desire to know what his own lost sense failed to give. Philetus understood, and faced him, speaking with distinct articulation, "It's like the damned broke loose, Con. It's like the devils on a spree. Them trees has souls. All things has bodies, but there is a spiritual body. Hear 'em yell. Hear 'em howl."

Mrs. Preston turned to listen. He was at his strangest. Philetus rarely indulged her so freely with his fragmentary phrases of half meanings, and was really addressing only his friend. Something about her was apt to bring him down to lower levels. Now the pair as they gazed or listened interested her greatly. "It is terrible," she said.

"And it were all set for to be," returned Philetus. "When them trees was little sprouts it were to be, and they growed, and growed, and here they be tormented like. An' men 'll live in 'em when they're houses and not know."

"You should have been a preacher," said Riverius at his side.

Phil was too far on his way to be stopped by the laughing tone of the German's remark.

"Preacher?" he said. "I ain't no more a preacher than the Lord lets me be. Them logs is preachin' now. You just listen to them."

"It's a good deal like a camp-meeting," said Riverius,—"about as chaotic, and about as reasonable."

"I'm not ag'in' camp-meetin's. When you meets them thar logs in heaven, you'll know better."

Riverius smiled. "Well, it's not very clear to me at present. I can wait. I hope that boom will hold. What does Rollins say?"

They were now alone on the cliff, the logs floating tranquilly by them in thousands, now pausing, now set in motion by a dozen busy men who leaped with agility from one rolling log to another, pushing this and holding that trunk, a manly and exciting spectacle.

Presently Consider touched the sleeve of Riverius. The German, who by this time understood the man, followed him apart and waited. The deaf woodman hesitated. At last he said, "Ance is come back." It was useless to speak, and Riverius merely nodded. "He don't like you, sir; and Rollins he ain't forgave you, nuther, about that mill."

"Ah!"

"Ef I was you, sir, I'd git away from here till them fellers simmers down a bit."

Riverius shook his head. "I? Not I." A look of scorn crossed his face; but he took the woodman's hand, to show that he thanked him, and turned away.

"Don't skeer more nor a rattlesnake," said Consider. "Well, I done my dooty. And Phil don't love him, nuther. It's queer. Guess ef Myry

Richmond didn't think sech a heap of him, Phil would 'a' liked him better. He's pizen jealous. That's his eyes. Phil ain't one as likes to be looked down on, nuther, and he hadn't oughter be."

The danger indicated did not disturb Riverius for a moment. He had been among bullets in his youth, and the open-air life of the woods has always a remarkable power to keep men free from nervous sense of risks. Presently he went away to walk home with Paul and his mother. The influence of an unusual excitement made them silent, and they moved thoughtfully through the darkening wood-spaces, and by dusk reached the cabin. She, at least, had more than enough to think over to make her grateful for the absence of talk.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next day Riverius went again over to Olean, across the New York line, and was gone a week, about some of the machinery for the mill, at which Philetus and Consider had been working steadily. It was now ready for the saw and gearing, the natural dam above it having been raised and strengthened. To leave annoyed Riverius; it was like declining a challenge; but he was too proud to stay merely because of any possible opinion, and it was but for a week.

The day before his return, Paul sat under a tree at his lessons, his mother near him, her work in her lap. Miriam had come over for a call, and the small maid was, as usual, busy teasing, attracting, or caressing Paul. Now she was pelting him with acorns.

"Oh, can't you quit?" he said. "You're worse than vulgar fractions."

Next she was behind him, tickling his neck with a straw.

"Hang the flies!" said Paul. "Oh, it's you. Now you let me alone, and when I've done we'll build a dam."

The child preferred more instant attention to so remote a prospect. "I'll help you," she said. "Tell Phely 'bout 'rithmetic."

"One and one makes bother," cried Paul. "That's 'rithmetic," and, so saying, fled to the house, while Miriam laughed.

"He might just play a little," she said. "We don't get over that often."

Mrs. Preston, in a brown study, looked up. "He must do his lessons. That is my rule. Ophelia can wait."

The child's mother was silent. Then she said, "That's the way. Boys have the best of it. Girls must wait till they want them. It's the same with us women. It's wait and wait."

"Really," said Mrs. Preston, "you are rather discontented in your ideas, Miriam. It seems very simple to me."

"And where's Mr. Riverius?"

"He has gone to Olean for a week."

"You must miss him. He's just a lovely man; and his manners—he's just like a duke."

"I never saw a duke."

"But you miss him. I would. He don't come over none now. It's funny, Mrs. Preston, but my man's jealous of him."

"Oh, not really?" The gossip annoyed her. "You are sure you have not been foolish, Miriam? I, I mean—well, you know, it is quite natural Mr. Riverius should think you handsome. The fact is, you are. I fancy you know it."

"Yes, I suppose so. But, good gracious! I like Mr. Riverius,—of course I like him,—he's that kind, but he ain't no more to compare to Philetus Richmond than—than—well, I don't know what.

He hasn't got his wisdom. And for looks,—well! And Phil isn't drinking now."

"For that you may thank Mr. Riverius."

"And I do. I told Phil so Sunday."

"That was not very wise."

"I don't see why."

"You cannot know men, my dear, if you cannot see that."

"He didn't like it, that's a fact." Then there was a pause.

"How have your potatoes done?"

"Oh, first-rate. And yours?"

"Pretty well."

"Phil says the mill will be running in two weeks."

"Yes."

"They've got orders already."

"Yes."

"I hear Ance Vickers broke the jam. I wish he'd stay away."

"Yes, it is desirable."

"There, I've dropped a stitch."

"Mrs. Richmond, Miriam, can I trust you? I want to ask you a question, and I want to feel sure that you will never speak of it."

"Madam, I shall be as silent as Laertes."

Bessy Preston smiled. "We do not know how well he kept his pledge, but that will answer." She paused: speech was hard.

"Have you heard any one say anything unpleasant about Mr. Riverius and me?"

"Oh, nothing just unpleasant."

"Well, anything?"

"I might have heard something. Folks will talk, but——"

"You will do me a true kindness by being frank."

"Well, they do say things."

"Such as——" urged Bessy, firmly.

"Oh, foolishness. You know, in the camps and around, men will talk."

"I must insist that you be more plain."

"Well, if I must. It's nothing more than just the way they always talk."

"Oh, *will* you go on?"

"It's nothing worse than that maybe you're a little sweet on Mr. Riverius. They do laugh about it a bit, Rollins and——"

"Not Philetus, surely?"

"My man's not much better than the rest. He will have his joke. You oughtn't to mind it any. I've often heard folks saying such-like things about me,—before I took Phil, of course; not now. You can be right sure I spoke up and gave them a piece of my mind."

"Thank you," said Bessy. "Excuse me. I'll be back in a minute." She went around the kitchen, drew up the bucket from the cool well, took a long draught, and went back. "We have a few egg-plants, Miriam. Will you take some home?"

"Thank you. And about that?"

"Oh, we will drop it. I was curious, of course. You will kindly remember not to speak of it."

"Not while I exist," said the actress, solemnly.

"And if—if it occurs again, be kind enough to —well, don't defend me, that's all."

"Oh, it isn't worth while."

"No, it is not. Come in. I must hear Paul's lessons."

The day went by, and quite late Miriam had gone away with the attractive Phely, who knew neither pause nor rest and was as little like the shy Ophelia as a babbling brook is like a mountain lake. Glad to be alone, Mrs. Preston went through her daily tasks next day, silent and absorbed in thought. Time had been when she ceased to see or to think of Riverius during his frequent absences. But now she was annoyed to find that the face and form of her friend haunted her. She began to have those uneasy heart-stirs at his coming, and constancy of remembrance when he was away, which at least to the matured woman are full of meaning. Suddenly she said, aloud, "I cannot stand it. It is dreadful. I must end it." She dropped her work and went out. With slow, half-guided steps, she went past the well, and, mechanically lifting her skirts, passed among the blackened stumps and came to the snake fence. Here she saw that she had missed the point where four bars, loosely let into the posts, answered for a gate-way. She turned aside, let down a lower rail, stooped, and, passing under, went on into the open grove of pines.

For a few weeks after her husband's death, she had more than once stood beside his grave. It had been hard to do. The thoughts and feelings conven-

tionally assigned to women in her situation were not hers. She had looked at the heap on which the pine needles were gathering, and had left it, angry with herself, or at least troubled, because the far-away remembrance of a golden morning had not power to make her forget the clouded sadness of a later time. She was capable of desiring to be honest with herself about the man she left beneath the pines, but revolted from facing the full truth, and soon found for herself the excuse that there was no need to balance the account between them. In the dreadful revealing light of his later days she had been led to see how little he had ever been to her at his best, and had made haste to put it all aside. But now, now it was otherwise. Mysterious impulses drew or urged her to stand again where she had been but seldom since those first sad visits, when the strong dutiful effort to forgive had brought back to her such a host of miserable memories that she had hesitated at last to repeat a disastrous effort. Shred by shred he had torn from her friends, position, her boy's means and her own, and, worst of all, had as recklessly cast away her enormous capacity to love, taking all that with boundless generosity she gave, and giving ever less and less in return. What another man might have made of her proud, passionate, self-contained nature she had had no chance to know. She was a woman to be won through her exquisite joy in giving, and, because he was feeble and needed her, the bond of love had held her long. But now! She was sore beset. Two or three weeks had brought her face

to face with certain facts from which many other women would have shyly retreated, putting off the unpleasant day of self-reckoning. It was not her way. She went always to meet danger, and protected herself by courageous settlements of a doubt or difficulty. Moreover, she had a certain rectitude even in her sentiments. She looked sadly on the grave, covered with pine needles. For a half-hour she stood, silent, swayed by many thoughts. At last she murmured, "Never, never! Life is over. Ah, why am I a woman? Good-by." And she turned and went away, conscious how terrible it was for her to stand there with the full, indisputable knowledge that another love was setting her heart in a tumult of shame and self-reproach. For as to this, too, she had no margin of doubt. Hope she had none. Riverius had been always the cool, reserved, definitely friendly man. Of his true life, station, and means she knew but little. Clever enough to see that he felt that he owed her a debt, and that he also liked her, she was pleased that he ceased to embarrass her by too much talk as to what she had done for him. She was at no loss to see that he did not love her. But how thoughtful he was! In a dozen careless ways he might have subjected her to the scandalous gossip which now, with no shadow of reason, had at last arisen. A hard task was before her. Would Riverius understand her? She had some pleasant confidence that he would. But—and she flushed scarlet, giddy with the mounting blood—how should she find words to speak? And yet she

must. It was Paul's life as well as her own that was in question. That at last decided her.

Riverius came home in high good humor, and went away at once to the mill. Thence he sent back Paul to bring him a measuring-tape and a level. The boy searched in vain. At last he crossed the clearing and asked his mother to aid his search. "He is in an awful hurry, mother," he said.

She came to the fence. "I would rather not look among his things, Paul. Tell him you cannot find them."

"Oh, but do come!"

"Do as I say."

"All right," he answered, and returned to the mill, where he simply related what had passed.

Riverius reflected. "Ach, we must wait till tomorrow. Come along, Paul."

The boy chattered, asking, as usual, numberless questions, to which his companion made but brief reply. He, too, was beginning to think. He well knew that had she done as Paul desired he would not have liked it. She had been always a charming companion, modest, reticent, reserved, intelligent, full of the best tact, a thoroughly well-bred woman, yet capable of simple, friendly interest, and now so noble to see. The brown drift of hair had made her look older when she was pale and worn; now it only served to emphasize the growing bloom of cheek, the fuller form, the light easy strength of movement, which could hurry without loss of stately grace. Next his mind wandered away to

his Saxon home, and he strode along ignoring the lad at his side. "It is well that I should go away," he thought. Some gossip of the camp had reached him also. He would think of it alone that night. "Der Teufel!" he muttered; "why did she not fall out of that boat? I should have upset it, and—— Well, all debts are disagreeable, and this seems hopeless. Would she let me educate the boy? That would be worth doing. What a man he will make! And at home,—well, I suppose he would be talked of as my son. Himmel! This world is a difficult place to live in."

CHAPTER IX.

Some days went by, and Mrs. Preston's intentions were not carried out. She saw, in fact, little of Riverius. He was here and there, hunting with Paul, surveying land, chaffering with woodmen, loggers, and raftsmen,—in fact, a restless, ardent nature, interested in many things, and capable of calm and thorough self-government.

And now the mill was finished, after much delay. There were some improvements,—machines for hauling logs up to the sharp jams of the saws, —and as to these opinions differed in the woods and among the loggers. Would Mrs. Preston go over to see the mill start? And perhaps he might also ask Miriam and the little Ophelia. When Riverius mentioned it to Philetus, he said that Mrs. Richmond was busy making apple-butter and couldn't come. Obstacles small or great in a less or larger degree excited the German. He said no more, but walked over the hills that afternoon and promptly disposed of apple-butter and all other difficulties. When she so told Philetus, he said, "He oughter took my word. I said, says I, 'Mr. Ryverus, my wife's apple-butterin',' and that oughter of answered for most folks."

"But I'm right glad it didn't, Phil. He was that nice about it, and he said I was to persuade you, because it was you had fixed it, and no other

man on the river could have thought to do it. And the new log-drag,—he said you understood that just as if you had invented it."

"Did he say all that 'ere, Myry? You've got a way of standin' up and actin' things like I can seem to see you."

"Oh, he said it all."

"Then he said a heap too much," muttered the blind man.

"What do you mean, Philetus?"

"Oh, I ain't ear-blind."

"Look here, Philetus Richmond, you've been a-saying things the past few weeks that hurts me awful. I never looked at another man to liken him to you since we were made one. Mr. Riverius is a kind man and a gentleman, and you're making a fool of yourself. The way you let that Rollins talk about him and Mrs. Preston is a shame. Oh, you needn't kiss me. I'm angry. That spoils kissing. And whiskey kisses are not to my taste, sir,—not at all. When you take a little drink you get to be a fool. I don't believe Solomon could have stood corn whiskey and just kept up being wise."

"Lord, Myry, what a tongue you've got! I ain't never had sech a goin'-over. As for Ryverus——"

"You just let him alone, Phil. For a right smart man, you can get yourself to believe more nonsense than the biggest ass in Rollins's camp. If you think I 'ain't made a good wife, you'd best say so. I'm getting wore out, what with your notions and your visions."

The wifely indictment was just, and Philetus knew it for the time. Morbidness like his is apt enough to fall before the shaft of reason, sped from the bow of whole-minded vigor.

"I don't say I ain't wrong, Myry. I'm kind of flurried in the head these last weeks."

"It's whiskey, Phil."

"No, it ain't. A man that's a thinkin' man, Myry, he gits some foolishness a-simmerin' in his head, and then he jus' gits het up and sets all his reason to bilin' his folly."

"Well, I wish it would boil over and put out the fire and leave me some peace. Half the time of late I can't tell what you mean."

The blind man swept a hand across his brow. "What's the time of day, Myry?"

She looked at him somewhat amazed. "About five," she said. "The clock isn't right. It's 'most a half-hour wrong."

Of a sudden, "I thought it was midnight. That's strange. I guess I was dreamin'."

"You can't be just well, Phil. If you would only quit liquor and see if it isn't that."

At this moment Ophelia appeared from without. "Give me a ride on your shoulders," she cried. He picked her up, glad of the diversion.

"What makes your breath smell so? Phely doesn't like you when you smell bad."

He set her down silently, feeling that his troubles were multiplying. "You're cryin', Myry," he said.

"She does cry right often," said Ophelia. "What hurts mother?"

"I'm a bad man, baby," groaned the blind giant.

"Oh, Phil, don't!" said the wife. "Don't,—not before the child. I won't go to the mill."

"And I say you must," said Philetus. "Don't you go to think I care for Ryverus."

"Phely will go," said the child.

"I don't seem to care about it."

"Well, you're a-goin', and I've said it."

"Very well, I'll go."

On a pleasant day well into September the little party left Mrs. Preston's cabin to see the working of the new machinery which had so much interested the loggers. Above them the hickories yellowed, the gum-tree cast its crimson leaves, the maples were red and gold, and the dogwood wore its livery of deepening red. Beneath their feet the leaves were rustling thick, and the air was full of sailing, drifting leaves, a flitting rain of varied colors. Decision had left her calm and less unhappy.

"How different," she said, "our autumns must be from those of Europe! Ours are always so beautiful that one is bribed to forget the sadness of decay and change."

"Certainly our German autumn is more dreary, the colors less bright. Look at that scarlet vine around the dead pine, and on the rocks too against the gray. You should see an autumn in Maine, when no leaf has dropped and when a light snow has fallen. The leaves set against its whiteness are past belief as things of this earth."

"Well, to come back to it," said Mrs. Preston, "I forgot to ask if you got your letters. There were several. A man brought them over from Olean. Paul left them in your cabin."

"Yes, I got them. They brought me bad news."

"I am very sorry."

"My brother is very ill." He said no more,—nothing of his plans, nor of how the news affected him. For a moment both were silent. Then she said, firmly,—

"Mr. Riverius, you have been a good friend to Paul and to me."

He looked up surprised. "I have wished to be."

"Has it ever happened to you to hear any—any one talk lightly of me—it is very hard to say—and of you?"

He glanced at her, and looked aside, not seeking her flushed face again. "I respect you too much, madam, not to answer honestly. Mrs. Richmond did once hint to me——"

"That will do. These long tongues are sometimes useful. I have heard as much,—quite too much. I am alone; my boy is all I have. It becomes me to be more than merely prudent. I have made up my mind to go away. It is not, it will not be, very easy, but I must do it. I shall go to New York. I have some talents, as you know, and I can get on, and after a while Paul will be able to earn something."

He raised his hand.

"One moment," she said. "You are a gentleman. You will, I know, understand me, and—

and not try to read between my words when there is nothing to read."

"Mrs. Preston——"

"Please don't discuss it. It is very simple."

"I do not mean to discuss it. You are right; but there is an easier way. I have all my life been cursed with a certain ridiculous aversion to talk over my own affairs. I——"

"There is no need to," she said, proudly.

"Oh, but there is. I came here a stranger, and you saved my life. I would rather—well, I hardly mean what I was about to say, that I would rather you had not. But that would be absurd. Life is pleasant to me, and more now than ever."

She trembled. What did he mean?

"I have learned from you, madam, many lessons. You have been a good friend. Of course I understand you. If I had had more easy willingness to talk about myself, I should have saved you an unpleasantness. I had meant to go away as soon as the mill was done. My news of to-day makes most needful that I do go at once."

"It is quite as well," she answered,—"quite as well. When do you go?" She was vexed with him and with herself.

"To-morrow. I shall hope not to be altogether forgotten. And you will answer my letters?"

"Perhaps."

"Oh, but you must."

"I dare say Paul will write to you." It was getting to be a little too much for her. "How lovely that sumach is! Paul, Paul," she cried.

The boy looked back. "Be careful; you will upset the lunch."

Had Riverius been a vainer man, he would have had some suspicion of the tumult in her heart. Her great self-control aided to deceive him. She said, with a pretty shyness which had a certain mysterious grace in a woman of her height and general gravity,—

"You will think me a very singular person, Mr. Riverius. But you will, I trust, allow something for my free wood-life and the need one has here to be decisive."

"If I say what I think of you, Mrs. Preston, it will be that you have some of the best qualities that belong to the best men. You will credit me with the fact that I never paid you a compliment before."

Bessy Preston scarcely relished the compliment. She laughed. "Well, that is a good thing for Paul. Oh! I see the mill. How large it is! Ah, my poor pines! How they will go!"

"I did not tell you I had bought Simpson's tract. We need the wood."

"Why, it is thirty thousand acres."

"A little more."

"Oh, is it?" She could not help reflecting that he would at some time have to return. "Who will look after the mill?"

"I can trust Philetus until I come back. I suppose now that you will not have to leave."

"No, I shall stay. Frankly, it would have been difficult to go."

He did not say when he would return, and both had by this time recovered their full self-control. She, at least, was glad to escape so readily from a position of overwhelming embarrassment; and as for Riverius, he did not fully realize the feelings which, beginning in simple friendliness of relation with an unusual woman, might under other social circumstances have grown to fruitage which was unsuggested by the merely pleasant florescence of what seemed to him hardly more than a grateful comradeship. Then, also, he was much moved by the morning's news. It was, as he knew, a serious factor in his life, and, while it might leave him more free in certain ways, was with his peculiar ideas and education as likely to render him in others far less independent. Should he tell her? And why not? As far as his opportunities had allowed, he had a subtle insight into Bessy Preston's character. Her proud dignity, her great self-respect, had at first surprised and even half amused him in a woman poor, friendless, and isolated. As to her past life and position he guessed something, but knew little, and in his ignorance of the peculiarities of American society remained rather puzzled; and this, perhaps, added to the interest she excited. He had the idea that to tell her all would be in a measure to widen the distance between them; and this he was disinclined to risk. As he walked on in silence, he grew perplexed over what seemed to him so simple a matter. Then he tried the useful test of mentally reversing their relative conditions, and at once decided to wait.

In fact, there was in his mind a reserve influence of faintly-felt possibilities, not vigorous enough to help him, and yet such as served to make him fearful.

He went on to speak of Philetus, the business, the mill, and of Paul, giving her useful hints as to how to continue the boy's education and how to fit herself to aid it. Then he said he would send up some books and would leave his painting-materials. Never had he seemed to her more thoughtfully useful; and her heart throbbed unpleasantly at the idea of how much she should lose by his absence. And now they had reached the mill. She was sorry.

A half-dozen men, afoot or seated about on the stumps, were talking over their doubts as to the new machinery. Paul was everywhere, amused, excited, and interested, and Philetus, with his wife and Ophelia and Kinsman, stood on the open mill-platform. Some of the men, smiling, nudged one another, without much reserve, and to the German's annoyance. Mrs. Preston was coldly indifferent, or seemed to be. At last two great iron clutch-hooks were made fast to a huge pine trunk which Consider had drawn to the foot of the inclined plane, and, Philetus moving a lever, the great sober water-wheel turned around and the log on rollers passed up the slope and paused before the saw.

"Now," said Riverius to Miriam, "pull this lever." He had meant to ask Mrs. Preston, but it occurred to him that it would be unwise to put

her forward, and he turned abruptly to Mrs. Richmond. Bessy understood him at once. She was proud to feel how well she always comprehended him.

Philetus was curiously excited. "Now let her live!" he cried. "Let her work! Let her git a soul!" Consider studied his face with admiration. Miriam, much pleased, moved the lever, and at once the steel began to flash, the teeth bit on the log, the resinous saw-dust flew in yellow spouts high in air, and the men on the bank hurrahed. Only Ance, a little back in the woods, sat still, disappointed as to his predictions of failure. Paul cried out with delight. "Just hear it, Mr. Riverius! The saw says, 'Go it, go it.' Guess it seems to like it."

Philetus laughed. "When you git a soul, you'll talk too, Paul. Boys is only a gropin', like."

Then the log retreated, and was set to one side a little, and again the saw gnawed at it briskly until plank on plank fell from the great tree now on its way to men's uses.

Presently Riverius saw Ance, and strolled away until he came beside him. He felt happy in his success, and was inclined to leave one less foe behind him. Smiling at his own unaggressive and kindly mood, which more things than the mill might have helped to explain, he touched the moody man on the shoulder.

"Halloo, Vickers," he said. "I am going away. If you have forgotten our little quarrel and will promise me not to drink while I am gone, I would

like you to go up to my new tract and boss my wood-gang." It was thirty miles distant, and he had the idea that Ance would be kept away for some months and that Mrs. Preston's fears as to Ance and Paul would be at an end.

"I don't want none of your work, Mr. Ryverus," said Ance.

"The wages will be good if you boss the gang." The offer was tempting.

"Darn the wages! Look here; you and me ain't even. I ain't no man to be bought. Now, I just tell you I ain't. You had whip-hand of me once, and I 'ain't forgot it."

"But you could not expect me to stand by and see you kill that boy. You would both have dropped thirty feet the next moment. I can tell you, my man, I did you a good service." Resistance from his inferiors annoyed him, and he was getting vexed.

"Then why the thunder didn't you lick the boy, or let me lick him? I'd have basted him well."

"That was not possible," said Riverius.

"Oh, I reckon not. Little gentlemen can't be licked when they play tricks. Mother wouldn't like it."

The German grew pale, and controlled himself by an unusual effort.

"I came here to do a kind act. I am not fond of quarrels. I see that I might have saved myself the trouble."

"That's so," said Ance, insolently.

The German turned and left him.

"He ain't afeard," soliloquized the woodman. "I'd 'a' done it, and let the thing slide, but he's that air stuck up, it riles a man. I'd jus' like to throw him once wrastlin'; then I'd let the thing slide." And he kept this mood until he was drunk again and amused the loggers by threats of what he meant to do some day.

CHAPTER X.

At break of day Riverius was gone. He had settled his affairs and said a quiet good-by the night before and left a note asking Mrs. Preston to see after his cabin.

The fall came fast; the leaves drifted in gold and red from the trees, and at last, in October, the first snow fell. Paul was growing strong and looked well. The German had said some things to him when they parted which had made the gay lad more serious, and, except as to an occasional struggle concerning lessons when the skates Riverius sent with the books were available, he gave Bessy little cause for trouble. Now and then came a letter to Philetus, who was too much with Ance for his own good. Indeed, Consider being ill for a month, Richmond, despite Riverius's positive orders, gave his tempter work at the mill till it ceased to run, and then in the wood-gang. Ance had always a supply of whiskey. His wages were good, and, being unmarried, he had no mouths to feed save his own. The bribe was too great for Philetus; and, as the man was now constantly at their house, poor Miriam was in the utmost trouble. She appealed in vain to Philetus, and at last to Mrs. Preston, who, however, found that as Philetus drank more and more, her words were of little effect. When, finally, Mrs. Richmond in despair declared

to her husband that Ance had been rude to her, and she did not dare to say more, the blind woodman laughed. Ance, bow-legged, ugly Ance, presented to him no such possibilities of annoyance as did the quiet, handsome German, with his dominating ways and gentle manners. If she had said as much of Riverius, there would have been no limits to her husband's rage; but Ance, who helped him and drank with him, was too near for suspicion. He told her roughly that she was a fool, and gave Ance to understand that maybe somebody had been making mischief. Mrs. Preston once or twice resolved to write to Riverius, as he had given her a banker's address in London; but she found it hard to do, and the more so because he had written to Paul but once, and not at all to her. Perhaps, too, it would be unwise to interfere.

At last, when winter was well on them, Paul spoke. The boy surprised her at times, as one's children occasionally do, by his sudden attainment of thoughtfulness and new capacities to act.

"Mother," he said, "we haven't got in wood enough, and I went over to the mill, after what you said, to get Consider to help me a day or two. Well, he was sick; and—do you know?—Ance Vickers was helping to get down the saw. I told Phil, when I got a chance, Mr. Riverius wouldn't like that,—Ance being there, I mean."

"You were unwise, Paul."

"I told him, anyhow."

"What did he say?"

"Said it wasn't any of my business."

"That was true. Men do not like boys to reprove them."

"But he was smoking,—smoking about a mill! Next thing there will be a fire."

She was amused at the lad.

"You have eased your conscience, Paul. You got no one to help about the wood?"

"Yes; I met Pearson. He says he'll let us have a man."

"Very well. Now call Becky."

Paul had by no means eased his conscience. He was clearly of the opinion that it was not his mother's business to interfere, but he was not at all satisfied that, as the friend of Riverius, it was not his own duty, and Paul in his small way was beginning to feel, under the strong maternal rule, that duties are aggressive things and will not let you alone. He had also, of course, a lad's sense of the importance of being mixed up with the affairs of men. After much boyish reflection, he wrote to Riverius as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—I hope you received my last letter. This one is more important. Ance Vickers is at work at the mill. I mean, he was at work. And he is in your gang, too. It is my opinion the mill will get burned down entirely to the ground, because Ance was smoking. Of course it is not burned yet, and Ance is in the woods; so perhaps it will not burn down,—which would be a great misfortune. I thought I would let you know. This is not on account of my not liking Ance Vickers.

Mother is not well. [Here, when Riverius read this grave epistle, he made haste to turn the leaf.] It is only a headache. She often talks about you. [If Mrs. Preston could have seen this!] I told her last week I did wish you would come back, and I asked her if she did not wish so too. But she did not say. I guess she does. I got two groundhogs yesterday, and before snow fell I dug out three hell-benders. They are in a tub of water; but Becky wants it to wash, and I really do not know what to do with them. Perhaps you will not think this a long letter, but Jo Pearson says he can't wait; and so

"I am your friend,
"PAUL PRESTON."

"P.S.—I open this again to tell you I killed four rattlesnakes in September. One was four feet long and had seven rattles."

Paul's conscience was a little uneasy as to this letter, and before long Bessy found out the truth, but, to her son's surprise, she said very little, except to remark that he must be careful not to speak of it to Philetus,—a remark which inwardly Paul considered as rather disparaging to his wisdom.

Altogether, Mrs. Preston had a dull winter. The snow-blockade began early. Even the rough woodvisitors who came to ask rest, warmth, or a meal were rare. Miriam was cut off also, and of late, indeed, had been but sorry company. Thaws came at unusually brief intervals, so that the firm-frozen,

easily-traversed snow surfaces were wanting, and the drifts were deep and perilous. At times Mrs. Preston ventured out on snow-shoes, or, imprisoned at home, listened to the frequent complaints of Becky, who was always going to leave, and never went. There was painting, also, and Paul's lessons, and too often hours of unexpressed anxiety when the boy was away hunting on snow-shoes and the night fell without his return. She had tried to take a man's views of his needs and life, and often, when in terror at his long absence and the cruel storm without, was able to welcome him calmly and with deceitful appearance of having been quite at her ease. The more she thought of Riverius, the more she longed for and yet dreaded his return. What would he say? How would he look? How should she meet him? She would be very quiet and cool, but not too cool. That would not do. Then she reproached herself with folly and rushed fiercely into some manual work. Time and loneliness are potent ferments, and both were hers.

About this time Riverius answered Paul. He said, however, but little as regarded Ance. In March he wrote to Mrs. Preston:

"My dear Mrs. Preston,—My hope to yet soon return to the woods I love well is growing less and less. My brother's illness continues, and it does seem probable that I must go with him in summer to Switzerland. I tire here of a life to which I have grown unaccustomed, and de-

sire to be where now most of worldly interests lie, and with the duties they bring." Then he went on, in a friendly way, to speak of Paul. To this letter she replied in the same tone, saying only as to his possible return that he would be always welcome.

The summer came and went, each month filling her with discontent before unknown. At times the loneliness seemed intolerable; and when autumn passed once more into winter and the evenings grew long, she often sat silent over her work, wondering how long she could endure it. At times Riverius wrote to Paul, and once again to her a too brief note, in which he said little except that he hoped soon to see them. It helped her to feel that there was even a chance of his return. It was now February, some eighteen months since he had left. He wrote often to Philetus, but he was so anxious about matters nearer home, that Ance had passed out of his mind for the time, and the evident mismanagement of his affairs which he inferred from the letters Miriam wrote for Philetus did not so annoy him as under other circumstances it might have done.

It was now February. For once the snow was frozen hard, after a warm rain, and the trees were clad in mail of ice to the tips of every twig. The pines and spruces were great white cones of snow and ice, and the wind in the woods filled all the air with crackle and snap of the shivered ice garments on tree and shrub. Looking out, Bessie saw coming through the jewelry of frost-work

Philetus Richmond, muscular and large in his great fur coat and gloves.

"There is Philetus, Paul," she said. "Put on a log or two, and let him in."

He did so, and Philetus, in leggings, moccasins, and snow-shoes, entered. He had not been drinking: that was clear.

"I am glad to see you," she said. "How are your wife and Ophelia? We miss them. Why, good gracious, isn't that Ophelia?" A little red face, well muffled in furs, peeped over his shoulder.

"Phely is come for a visit. Phely's nose is cold." The child was wrapped in furs and strapped on the strong father's back. He undid the straps, unrolled her shawl, and set her down.

"Phely like this house," she remarked, complacently looking about her. "Who made all the flowers?"

"Nothing escapes her," said Mrs. Preston, smiling.

"How do you do, Paul? You want to see me. I very nice girl."

"Oh, very," said Paul. "Nicest girl I ever saw. But your nose is awful red."

She marched towards a small glass, climbed on a chair, and surveyed herself.

"I like my nose red." Then she got down and went on a tour of inspection.

"Who has made some new flowers? Was it you, Paul?"

"No; mother made them."

"You can't make flowers?"

"No."

Meanwhile, Phil took off his snow-shoes and sat by the hard-wood fire.

"Came over to see how you git on. Myry wanted to come; but I wasn't that sure of the freeze."

"And you carried the baby."

"Phely not a baby. I a girl."

"Oh, she's no great heft to her." And he turned his blind eyes towards the mite with a look of affection. "I want to make a swop, Madam Preston. I want to take Paul for two days. I am goin' over to our camp,—not Rollins's; ourn,—and we might find a deer handy on the way."

"Oh, mother, I never killed a deer," said Paul.

"Take Ophelia and go into the kitchen, and close the door," said Bessy.

"But, mother——"

"Do as I tell you."

He rose, took Ophelia's hand, and went out.

"Philetus," she said, "I am afraid."

"Of what, ma'am?"

"Of you. You drink nowadays. You have that man Vickers about your house. I used to be able to trust you."

"You kin. I 'ain't drunk none in a week, not nigh a'most on to nine days. Myry she's been makin' a row."

"I should have made a worse one long ago."

"You ain't that kind, ma'am. Not that Myry ain't right. I admits that."

"Then why do you drink?"

"I git lonesome in the woods, and Consider he's that deef, and Ance——"

"Well, that will do. I suppose no man knows why he ruins his home and makes his wife hate him."

"I won't drink none, I promise,—not a drop. Nary a drop. And we won't stop only fur a night in Rollins's camp. And Ance—I've let him go. He ain't workin' for us none now."

"Indeed?"

"Have you heerd from Mr. Ryverus?"

"No."

"I got a letter last week. Bin a heap of time comin'. Barstow fetched it over. Shouldn't wonder ef Ryverus was to turn up here 'fore long. The letter didn't name no time of comin'." It had caused Philetus to take the prudent step of advising his boon companion to find work elsewhere.

"Well, Paul may go; and I shall be charmed to keep Ophelia. How amusing she is!"

"Yes; she's as good as a baby circus. Might I call Paul?"

"Certainly."

In an hour or two they set off. Phil's affections were curiously strong. As to Ance, his regard was due at first to his having saved him during the sudden break-up of a jam, years before, and he felt it now disloyal to break with him, as in his wiser moments he was inclined to do. But for Paul he had a distinct admiration, and found in him a ready listener,—a thing he liked well and

rarely found. They strode along swiftly, with the curious swinging, shuffling gait the snow-shoes exact, and soon were deep in the woods.

"Shall we have to camp at Rollins's?" said Paul.

"Yes, ef he 'ain't moved. If he has, we'll make a wickey up and bide out. Rollins he's had a row 'bout wages. He's just as close-fisted as a fern in May. Never noticed them May ferns? Then you look next spring."

"Isn't there coal about this country, Phil?"

"Lots! That's what fetched us here fust. There's coal on that Pearson tract, and that air man Ryverus knowed it. As for me, it won't do no good in this world. And when it comes to another I hopes to git where no coal ain't wanted."

"And you will see in that world," said Paul, gravely.

"And Consider, he'll hear. That'll be cur'us. Consider 'll hear. Talkin' of seein', air we in the ox-track? I oughter of fetched Consider."

"Yes. There are the marks of the hubs on the bark; but it's well snowed up. I'll tell you if we get off it."

"What's that?" He paused.

"I heard nothing."

"I heerd something. Boys 'ain't no ears. Look about you to left, on the ground."

"By George, it's a bear! Here's the tracks."

"Lemme see." And, lying down, Philetus removed his mittens and carefully studied the footmarks with his fingers. At last, looking up, he said, "They're fresh sence the rain. I can smell

him. He ain't far. What's he doin' around this time of year? Guess the warm day's sot his blood a-goin'. Let's foller. Kin you see the trail right well?"

"Yes." And they went on. Presently Paul stopped. "I see him. He's behind a rock. I can see his ears. We've got the wind right."

"Now look here, Paul," whispered Philetus. "Slip round to right. Git near a tree, mind that, —a smallish one. Step aside when you fires, to clear the smoke, and load at once. And don't git buck-fever, nuther. It's business. I'll wait here."

The boy, tremulous with joy, moved cautiously, stooped, rested an elbow on one knee, and fired. Then he leaped to one side, loaded, and looked. He heard a growl, and saw the bear, which was hit in the shoulder, advancing only too quickly. The guide heard him. "Up a tree!" he cried. "Quick! Dern it, you've wounded him." The boy was not minded to fly just yet. As the bear rose over a log not twelve yards away, Paul fired again, and then waited. "He's dead," he said, and, reloading, went forward with caution. "All right," he added. "Clean shot through the mouth."

Philetus came up. "Gosh, but he's big!" he said. "Here, cut off his tail, or they won't believe down at Rollins's. Don't think I'll go bearin' ag'in with you: you're too resky. We'll git his back and hide to-morrow. Come along now. It's gittin' on."

With many a lingering look of pride, the young hunter moved away, the tail in his belt.

"Now keep a-lookin' sharp. Think I smell fried bacon now; but it's a matter of three miles. Eyes ain't no account ag'in' smell, and smells stick to the ground, and that's why beasts is on all-fours. A man's kind of canted up on his hind legs, built for to keep sarchin' with his eyes. My smeller's a-gittin' better every year. I kin pretty nigh see things with my nose."

"I should think, Phil," said Paul, "you would be wanting to go around on all-fours pretty soon."

"And don't I, when I'm givin' my smell its rights? Didn't I git down to smell that bar? Consider 'lows I can't really smell a bar." Then the old fellow paused, and slowly added, as if to himself, but quite aloud, "'Tain't all clear gain. I'm gittin' nigh on to the beasts some ways." The boy looked around at him, but was tactful enough to make no comment.

"Oughter be black oaks hereabouts," he went on, touching the trees to left and right, and instantly naming them as he did so. "Know 'em by their hides, Paul. Some I likes, some I don't. Poplars I hates." And, dropping now and then his odd bits of woodcraft, they sped on over the creaking, crackling, ice-clad drifts, until the dusky woods grew strange in the moonlight. At last they missed the ox-road, and, after careful search and some use of Paul's compass, found it again.

And now the moon was well up. Vast shadows of the pine and spruce lay black on the clean, shining snow. A windless night, cold and dry. Now and then a sharp clatter of ice falling from a

branch was heard, or the sharp crack of a branch overweighted and broken. Once or twice a faint breeze stirred the stiffened leafage of the evergreens, and then all the still forest awoke with innumerable sounds of tinkling and complex noises, like the dull roar of surges crushing on a distant beach. All the notes so heard had a marvellous distinctness in the dry, clear air, where at times the noiselessness was absolute. Once they stayed to tighten the snow-shoe straps and to clear them of twigs, and stood then a moment awed by the unearthly silence of the moonlight spaces. Suddenly there were quick crunching sounds to left, as the sharp feet of a superb doe broke through the surface at each bound. She came from behind a mass of rocks, and plunged with labor and wearily through the yielding snow-crust,—an easy prey, and vast to the eye, in the dimly-lit woods, against the white drifts beyond. Paul raised his rifle,—when, to his surprise, Philetus said, abruptly,—

"Don't ye do it, Paul. She's a doe. I don't hear no horns rustle."

"Oh, confound it!" said the boy. "What a shot! What made you stop me? I've lost her. Let's follow."

"Thought I heerd no horns ag'in' the branches," returned Philetus. "It air too like killin' things in a church on a Sabbath. Seems most like God's Sabbath in this here wood. Don't you mind. Deers is plenty."

"But I never shot a deer," cried Paul.

"Wall, you kind of give me that 'ere doe, Paul.

I were a-thinkin' of Myry jus' then. Queer, weren't it? I were a-thinkin' ef ever I come home and found Myry gone—or dead, like that 'ere pretty doe might 'a' ben."

The excess of sentiment astonished the boy less than it would have done in any other of the rough men about him. He was accustomed to the singular moods of his companion, who at times was thought by his comrades to be, as they said, a bit strange. "You will have to get me another shot, Philetus. I can wait."

"All right. You're a boy as kin understand a man. You ain't so sot up as Ryverus. He 'ain't no comprehension of any man's ways 'cept his own. And he don't talk out, nuther. Seems as ef he was allus a-hidin' things, and, soon's ever he's made up his mind, speaks out like he was a capting. He'll git in trouble, sure, some day."

Philetus had always a certain sense of disturbance when the handsome and decisive German came into his thoughts, and to argue with him on this matter was only to make things worse, as Paul very clearly knew.

"Well, he's gone, Phil, and he isn't very likely to come back soon."

"Oh, but he is."

"What makes you think that, Phil?"

"He's bin a-writin' to me."

"Indeed? I wish he would come."

"And I don't. He ain't wanted none."

Paul thought it singular, and walked on, wondering why the German, so pleasant to him, should

be so little liked by others; for Philetus was by no means alone in his opinion. But the boy held his peace, and Philetus went on:

"Don't you go to tell them men in camp 'bout that 'ere doe. It ain't no man's business but yourn and mine; and you don't mind a-losin' it. One man he's got one way of thinkin', and another he's got another way of thinkin', and it don't do no good to mix 'em up. As fur boys, they ain't called on to think. Their souls ain't growed enough. Kin you smell that bacon yit?"

"Of course," said Paul; "and very good it smells."

"Halloo! there's camp, sure 'nough. Don't you go to lettin' none of them men persuade you to take no whiskey. You won't see me takin' none."

"I take whiskey!" said Paul. "Not I." And he laughed as they came up to the huge log house full of chinks, through which the red light shot in widening bars out on to the snow and tree-trunks.

CHAPTER XI.

They opened the door and entered. In the centre a vast wood fire sought exit for so much of its smoke as got out at all through an opening in the roof overhead. The atmosphere was stifling. On rough wooden bunks around the walls a score of men lay smoking in lazy attitudes. Around the fire half as many more were gathered, lying on the ground or seated on rude benches. Rollins was there, and Ance Vickers, and many of the worst of the men more or less known to Paul. A noisy welcome greeted them as they entered and began to unlace their moccasins and kick off their snow-shoes.

"Any news?" said Rollins.

"None but Paul's shot a bear,—a buster,—clean through the mouth, and awful nigh, too."

"What! that boy?" said Ance. "Don't believe it."

"I didn't steal his tail," said Paul, displaying the trophy.

"Confound it if he hasn't!" said Rollins. Then the adventure was discussed, and bear-stories became for an hour the chief talk, until Rollins rose and said, "Time for roostin'," and one by one the motley crew took to their nests.

"Let's get out of this, Phil," said the lad, with disgust.

"I'm with you. We'll camp. Ther's a lean-to just outside." And in this, with a roaring fire at their feet, they found a more cleanly and more wholesome lodging, where, rolled in their blankets, they slept soundly.

The late dawn of winter made the camp slow in rising, and, moreover, a warm rain falling towards morning rendered the drifts treacherous and difficult. Hence, as Rollins and the camp-boss gave no sign of urgency, every one was late. The softening ice-crust and the increasing rain decided Philetus not to risk immediate travel. The boy spoke at once of the pledge Phil had given Mrs. Preston not to remain in Rollins's camp except for one night; but Philetus either thought or affected to think that it was unsafe to travel, and, as Rollins confirmed his judgment, Paul had nothing better to do than to wait. Once or twice he was tempted to return home and so fulfil the pledge by which in a way he felt that he also was bound. But to desert Philetus, blind, when his friend Consider was absent, seemed to the boy unfair, since, as he knew, the blind man at this season was less able to find his way than when the snows were gone. Moreover, without Phil's help that bear-skin would be hardly attainable, and the frozen carcass would be hard to skin even with the woodman's aid. Then, too, he was stiff from the walk of the day before; and so, as is usual in human affairs, a group of motives influenced his decision.

A few men were sent out from the camp to such work as was near. Oxen were fed, and the bob-

sleds overhauled. Some sharpened axes on the grindstone, which one of them turned. A few lit fires, and, regardless of the rain, stretched under a lean-to or a blanket on sticks, played with dirty packs of cards. Paul wandered from group to group of laughing and cursing men whose wages were accumulating in the hands of the few skilful gamblers always to be met with in every large woodgang. Here and there a man or two slipped into the woods to drink unwatched, for liquor was forbidden in the day, and, indeed, as a rule, not too much was taken at any time in the better camps.

The boy found it unpleasant. The coarse tales disgusted a nature trained to better things; the wild oaths, pausing at no name, however sacred, the dirt, the disorder, the bones and scraps of rag or paper, the close ill-smelling cabin, all combined to make him eager to get away; and Philetus, whose talk he liked, was missing. Towards noon, Paul took his rifle and strayed away into the woods, but, after a long round which took yesterday's tire out of his legs and to-day's disgust out of his mind, came back at dusk in a better humor, though without game of any kind. The rain was over, the air again cooler, and a vast fire was blazing in the open a little way from the cabin. Around it were lying on blankets a dozen or so of men, smoking, talking, and roughly chaffing one another. It was dark beyond the irregular flaring cone of flame which lit up with rosy flashes the white snow at a distance, and a noble blaze rose high overhead from the great trunks lavishly cast upon the fire. To Paul's sur-

prise, Philetus was standing facing him beyond the fire, too plainly a little under the influence of whiskey. Like most blind men, he usually carried his head far back, as if for security, but when he had been taking stimulus he lost this attitude and resumed the ordinary position of those who see. Paul had heard Riverius remark the peculiarity. At the blind man's feet lay Ance Vickers. Troubled at what he saw, Paul moved unnoticed around the outside of the ring, about the fire, catching with interest as he went the name of Riverius repeated with an unpleasant variety of angry or mocking comments. Presently the boy understood that the men were teasing Philetus.

"Ther' ain't no man kin boss Philetus Richmond," said the blind man.

"You're liquor pert," said one man.

"Jus' wait till he hears you've been a-takin' on Ance Vickers to work at that mill," said Rollins's foreman, rolling his tobacco in his palms preparatory to a smoke. "You wait and see."

"Why, you're a-talkin' as if Phil was skeered," said Ance, rising, his red hair and face glaring in the firelight. "Don't you fellers go to thinkin' as a man that kin handle any one of you is skeered at a furriner like him. I bet on Phil."

"Myry Richmond 'ill be glad to see him," cried a coarse young fellow nearer to Paul.

"Shut up!" said the blind man, a look of savage pain in his rugged face. "Fer derned little, I'd pitch you in the fire, Jo Blake."

"Ketch me first," answered the woodman.

"I kin ketch you, and hold you too," said Ance. "You 'ain't no call to talk that 'ere way to a blinded man, Jo Blake."

"I didn't go to say nuthin'. It ain't no business of mine."

"That's so," said another. "Here comes the gentleman. Git up and bow, boys."

A silence, however, fell on the group as the German advanced from the cabin to the fire. He had been forced to take refuge in Rollins's camp for a night much against his will, and for an hour or two had been changing his outer dress and foot-gear, and now, smiling and comfortable, approached the camp-fire. Then, seeing Paul, he made a circuit, and, coming to his side, after a hearty greeting, drew him away a little from the men.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" said the boy. "Mother was saying yesterday that you never would come till summer. Only yesterday she said she missed you so much, and——" Paul suddenly had a dim sense such as comes to a well-bred lad that the talk had been for himself alone, and so paused of a sudden in his revelations.

"Any one might be proud to know that a woman like your mother thinks kindly of him. You were about to say——"

"Oh, nothing," said Paul, as they stepped back from the fire.

"But it was something," cried Riverius, laughing, and laying a hand on the lad's shoulder.

"It wasn't anything, sir, only I just remembered mother doesn't like me to repeat things she says

Really, it wasn't anything." And he wondered at the German's unusual curiosity. As to the latter, Time, the pleasant artist, had been at his work of sketching a hundred charming pictures of Bessy Preston. At home, in courts, and while travelling, these came and went with backgrounds of the past and more delightful backgrounds of a future not of the woods. Difficulties which Riverius knew to be weak and imaginary, prejudices he only scorned, even some words of a younger brother, had been in and out of his mind, and left him always a little ashamed and more annoyed, but ever with a predictive sense that in the end another and nobler group of motives would prevail. What the boy had not said, his growing eagerness misapprehended. The heart is a deceitful courtier, and says only pleasant things to the sovereign brain.

"You are quite right, Paul," he returned, referring to the boy's reticence as to his mother's words, "I am back for a few days only, but I shall be here more or less. I landed last week. The voyage was long and stormy. What brought you to this dog-hole?"

Paul explained.

"I see," said Riverius, glancing at Philetus. "I overheard enough. What brutes drink can make of men!"

"When did you get here, sir?" said Paul.

"An hour ago. I did not want to stop, but I had to break the journey. I shall be off at daybreak. I am cold. Let us get a little of our share of the fire." And, so saying, he drew near again to the blazing logs. One or two of the men sullenly

made place for them, and, casting themselves on Paul's doubled blanket, they chatted quietly in an undertone. In a few moments Riverius looked up, rose to his feet, and, walking part-way around the fire, paused beside Philetus, to whom since Paul's return he had said nothing. At once expectant silence fell on the group.

Riverius touched the blind man on the arm. "You were talking about me, Richmond. Of course I overheard you." He felt that it was meant he should hear. "Come into the cabin with me a few moments."

"Guess we'll talk right here," exclaimed Phil, doggedly. "I 'ain't no reason to hide myself."

"I did not ask that. You were speaking of what concerns only you and me. Come, Phil."

"No, I ain't a-comin'."

"Family consarns," said Ance, who also had been drinking rather freely.

Riverius did not so much as turn his head. "Come, Phil," he repeated, quite gently.

"I'll talk to-morrer," said Phil. "Have a drink, Ryverus?"

The German flushed, and was turning away, when Ance Vickers remarked, "I'll talk to you, ef you want a little conversation. I was a-tellin' Phil you'd fix him for takin' me on to work. He ain't afeerd to say, and I ain't, nuther. That's what we was a-sayin', ef you want to know."

"Is that true?" asked Riverius, turning to Philetus.

"Yes, that's true. I ain't the man to shirk. Don't you be a-goin' to say that."

"I said no such thing. Come to me to-morrow, and we will have a settlement. Of course this ends our relation. I would have said it privately, but I have been forced to speak."

"All right," answered Philetus.

There were loud and forcible expressions of disapprobation among the nearer men who heard the talk.

"I call it pretty cussed mean," cried Ance,—"and a blind man, too."

"It is none of your business, my man," said Riverius, shortly.

"'Your man'! I'm my own man. You'd best git out of this camp. We don't want no furriners here."

Riverius moved aside, and then, as Ance stepped again before him, said, calmly, "Allow me to pass."

"Well, you kin." But he did not move.

"Then, if you will," said Riverius, and lightly, with seemingly but little effort, struck out from the shoulder, and Ance rolled over on the ground. Instantly there was confusion; but, as Ance rose furious and a little dazed, Rollins interposed and in a loud voice quieted the gathering group. "Of course this has got to be fought out," he said; "but no knives. Mind that. No knives."

"Chut!" said Riverius. "I never carried a knife in my life."

"And I don't need none for this here matter," cried Ance, savagely. "You wait a minute." So saying, he walked to the cabin and entered. He was enough sobered to know that the man who struck such a blow was more formidable than he had believed, and now he meant once for all to

settle this business. One or two men followed him. He asked one to pour a bucket of water over his head, then rubbed himself dry, kicked off his boots, tightened his belt, and threw aside his jacket and waistcoat. As he turned to go out, Paul was at his side, pale and alarmed, but resolute as he faced Ance. He well knew the strength and had witnessed the anger of the man. He was afraid.

"Well?" said Ance.

"You are not going to fight Mr. Riverius?" said the boy, faintly.

"Ain't I, just? You wait and see. Don't you bet on him none."

"Ance, Ance Vickers, if you won't fight him,—I—I—you may lick me as hard as ever you like."

Ance looked down on the small man with surprise, and not without the admiration which courage always excited in his heart. "You're a brave little cuss. I'll count you and me's even when I'm done with Ryverus."

"But you won't. Please, Ance. He isn't as strong as you. It's mean," he added, seeing the relentless face. Ance smiled.

"I won't kill him. Don't you be afeerd of that. He won't take much hurtin'."

Then the boy's soul rose for his friend at the note of scorn in Ance's voice. "Kill him!" he cried, proudly. "You haven't licked him yet."

"Derned ef I wouldn't like to have a young un like you," said Ance, laughing. "Git out. This air men's work." And he turned and went out, followed by the boy, who, fearful and troubled, but

still curious, climbed on to a tall stump and with beating heart stood to watch the result.

The ring opened, and Ance entered. As he came forward, Riverius threw off his coat and waistcoat, rolled his shirt-sleeves tranquilly up a pair of white, well-modelled arms, and, turning, faced his foe. There were quick words and phrases all around them, and the German knew that he was surrounded by enemies. Looking about him, he caught sight of Paul's serious face, and, laughing lightly, kissed his hand to the boy, understanding his anxiety.

"Back, there!" said Rollins. "Give them room."

"He'll guess a bar's got him," said one. "He'll need nussin'," said another.

Vickers advanced with care, meaning to make it a wrestling-bout. Then he ran in. Riverius caught him with left and right, two savage blows. At this Ance, surprised and furious, lost his head and made a less skilful rush. Riverius leaped aside and struck Ance below the ear. Poor Ance went down like a bullock in the shambles, and for a moment did not rise. Riverius fell back a pace and smiled grimly, remembering his days at Eton and their rough training. A murmur of amazed exclamations arose as Ance got up slowly and passed a hand across his face. He was bewildered and giddy, but again turned, facing his man. Some one cried out, "Take time, Ance. Give him a drink."

"I am in no hurry," said Riverius. "Have you had enough? Come, now," he added, gravely: "you haven't got the trick of it. Let's shake hands."

Ance stood still, looking about him at the sur-

prise and amusement in the men's faces. "Derned ef Ance ain't licked," said one. "No, he ain't," cried another. Suddenly Ance ran forward, dropped on his knee, caught the German by the legs, and threw him forward. "It's Ance's old fall." "By George!"

Had Riverius lit on his head, the fight would have had a serious ending; but Ance was out of condition, and Riverius, falling on his side, was instantly on his feet with cat-like agility. As Ance turned on him again, he struck him furiously, and, following hot with wrath, left him no chance to recover until, with the blood flying from his face, he was driven back helpless and dropped beaten among his friends. Riverius retreated and waited amidst a storm of admiring or derisive cries. Presently Ance came forward, blinded and bruised.

"Got enough?" said Riverius, sternly. "Confound it, I don't want to kill you. Here; shake hands."

"I've got enough," said Ance. "I've got enough for this time. And as fur shakin' hands, ef I'd licked you I'd 'a' shook hands quick enough. I 'ain't and I won't. You'll keep, I guess."

One of the men laughed. Riverius turned. "It's easy to laugh," he said. "If any of you think you are better men than Ance Vickers,—well, I'm not very tired." No one answered. Ance, amazed, looked up through his swollen eyes.

"You're the best of the lot, Mr. Ryverus. I'd like you ef I could. I jus' can't." And he moved away through the crowd.

Riverius turned to Rollins. "I see," he said, "that I am not over-welcome here, and I assure you I did not stop at your camp because I wanted to.—Come, Paul, let's get out of this."

Rollins said, "Well, you had fair play. You can't gainsay that."

"No; I am obliged to you.—Come, Paul."

As he passed Philetus, the blind man said, "Mr. Ryverus."

"Well?"

"You ain't done me justice, and you wouldn't stay none to listen."

"And I do not mean to now. You are a lot of curs.—Hurry, Paul."

An angry murmur arose, but Philetus said no word in reply, and soon Riverius and the boy were away through the woods.

After a few moments of silence Paul spoke: "I was afraid for you, sir, at first."

"Oh, he hadn't a chance. He is a good bit of a man, too. He did that fall well. I had a near thing of it. Do not let your mother know of it, and some day you must learn to spar."

A half-mile from camp the pair stopped, built a fire, made a lean-to of bark and blanket, and, with their feet to the fire, turned in. At dawn they were up and off, and in an hour found the bear, of whose defeat the boy had much to say. The carcass was still warm within, and, talking as they worked, Riverius skilfully skinned it, and then, loaded with meat and the fur, they went on again.

CHAPTER XII.

When Bessy, coming from the door-way, saw the two familiar figures, she stood still to quiet the violence of emotion which of a sudden disturbed her. Then she went out, meeting her friend with both hands as he offered his, and frankly showing her pleasure with such tranquillity as she could command. They took quick note of each other as they stood for a moment, and until she drew back he held her fast and looked seriously into the eyes which he had not forgotten. She met smiling his attentive survey. How handsome and gracious she was! Her size and pride of carriage lent some strange emphasis to the half-concealed gladness of her simple welcome.

"You look tired," she said.

"Yes, I am. Since I left you, I have had sorrow and known trouble." He did not say what. "How well Paul looks! And he has killed a bear. There will be no living with him after that."

"Indeed! So I see. How was it, Paul?"

He told his story, while at times she stole looks at Riverius. Then the latter explained that he had found Philetus drinking and had brought the boy away from Rollins's camp.

For a few days Riverius was greatly occupied in the woods, so that she saw him but little. He was away to Olean, or down to Smethport, or in

the camp, readjusting his affairs. He himself felt that he was restless. She learned by and by, to her surprise, that he had a new head to his woodgangs. When at home he was apt to be visited by one or another of his men or of those with whom he was in some way dealing, and it soon leaked out that for the first time Ance had met his match. Then she questioned Paul, who was now forced to speak, and so at last she heard all about Philetus and the boy's account of the famous battle. That the German was right and had been just she was sure, but she began to feel that the matter had sad aspects for Miriam. At length she determined to take advantage of a clear, cold day, and, with Paul for guide, set off on snow-shoes to visit Mrs. Richmond. It was a long walk, but she was well trained to this mode of progression, and surprised herself by her skill.

The little cabin was hot and close. Miriam, paler than common, but still in fair rosiness of overbloom, was charmed to see her. With her quick woman eyes Bessy saw at a glance that the customary neatness of the home was somewhat wanting. "How are you, Miriam?" she said. "And my little maid,—how is she? I thought I certainly must come over and see you. Where have you been?" Usually Miriam managed to visit her from time to time. She made no answer. "What is wrong, my friend?" said Bessy. "What is the matter?"

Poor Miriam burst into tears. "Everything's wrong,—everything! Philetus is drinking. Mr.

Riverius has turned him off. The wood-gangs are full. Consider he's abed and can't go round with him; and—and Ance Vickers comes here. He comes when Phil's away. And—oh, that man! If I tell Phil he'd kill him. One day he'd kill him, and one day he'd just laugh at me. I wish I was dead." And she hid her face in her hands.

"Well, Miriam, here are troubles enough, surely. By the way, Paul has a basket of things for you and a trifle for the child,—just a pretty frock. I made it myself. Come, let us see if it fits. I am here for the day. We have time enough."

The little lady was pleased with the gown, and surveyed herself with delight. Then she went away and sat down and smoothed out the skirt and showed a feminine joy in the novelty.

"How pretty she is!" said Bessy. "How dainty!"

"And what will become of her?"

"Hush. Come into the kitchen. There, now, there is nothing like a good talk. In the first place, I want to lend you some money."

"I can't—I can't take it."

"Nonsense!" And Bessy stuffed the notes into Miriam's pocket. "And now about Phil."

"Couldn't you ask Mr. Riverius to take him on again? He's that down now, and really sometimes he seems so strange it just frightens me. He says he sees visions."

"Visions?"

"Yes; it's a way he has sometimes; but now—oh, I don't know."

"I do not see how I can ask Mr. Riverius to take him back."

"Is he so hard?"

"No, he is not, but he is angry, and reasonably so. I will think about it. I hardly see my way."

At this moment they heard little Ophelia cry out, "Oh, father, come and see my frock. Come and feel it. It's so pretty. Me just like a lady."

"Here is Mrs. Preston, Phil," said Miriam, as he entered the kitchen.

"I am glad to see you, Philetus," said Bessy.

"Mornin', ma'am," he returned. "How's all you? How's Paul? Where's Mr. Ryverus?" he added, suddenly.

"He has gone to Smethport for three days. I am sorry you and he have fallen out."

"Well, I'm not. He's a hard man. He don't make no 'lowance for folks."

"Do you?" said Bessy. "I am afraid not."

"Well, I'm tired a lot. No eyes, no work, and Consider got the black-leg."[1]

"Come over and chop for me. We are running short of wood."

"I'll do it, and thanks. Air Mr. Ryverus a friend of yourn, Mrs. Preston?" He spoke abruptly.

"Certainly," she said, in surprise.

"Then you tell him to git away from these here parts. I don't mind him much, but there's some as don't hanker arter him."

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[1] A form of scurvy common among the ill-fed lumbermen.

"What is it you fear? I wish you would speak frankly."

"Well, maybe I dreamed he was in trouble. Anyways, he'd best go."

"It is hard for me to see why you talk in this way, Philetus. It puzzles me. Mr. Riverius has been away eighteen months. I know that he has dismissed you; but I know, and you know, that he had good cause to be angry."

"It ain't that. He's stirred up things sence he come back so's to make a lot of trouble. He gives big wages, and that takes the best men out'r other gangs. And then it's jus' a word and go. Things has got to go 'long like men was machines. Him and me ain't friends,—never was, and never will be."

"But you took his wages and did his work."

"Might be so, but I air done the like for the devil in my time,—more's the shame."

"Philetus!"

"Anyways, it's on my mind to tell you right out. There'll be trouble. I wish he'd 'a' stayed away. He ain't nothin' to me, and ef he hadn't bin your friend I wouldn't 'a' bothered none to speak."

"I will certainly tell him, Philetus; but he is the kind of man who does not give up easily. I incline to think that the very way to make him stay as long as he can is to tell him that there is risk in his staying."

"I kind of wonder what he keeps round here for, anyways. I heerd he was meanin' to put in another set of saws at the mill. That'll be a big business."

"He spoke of it the other day. I suppose that may help to detain him; but really, Philetus, it is hardly my affair, and you have put yourself out of it by your own action."

"The man he's got can't run it."

Bessy smiled. "You may be sure it will be made to run if Mr. Riverius stays a year."

"A year! a year!" said the blind man. "Lord! the wickedness kin be hatched in a year!" And he went out, Bessy looking after him anxiously.

Later in the day Miriam said to her, "I hope you will warn Mr. Riverius. Somehow they are all against him; and you know what these men are."

"I know," said Bessy, shuddering.

"And tell him on no account to come here."

"He is not likely to do so."

"Well, it seemed to me I must tell you. Phil—well, guess I won't say no more: guess I've said all I ought to." And she added nothing further.

Three days later, Riverius came back, and in the afternoon sat down to talk to her while Paul was away setting traps.

"I really have hardly seen you," he said. "Tell me everything."

She laughed a happy laugh, looking up at the German across her sewing. "You do not mean to stay here long?" It was a hope akin to fear.

"No," he said, gravely, "I have not forgotten."

"I do not mean that. How could you think it?" she returned, coloring. "The gangs, for some reason, I believe for little, are set against you, and

men's lives are little valued in this wilderness. A shot, a blow,—anything is so easy."

"Am I so unpopular? I wonder why." He felt his own difficulty of being on equal terms with the wood-people, and, also disliking the results, still wondered at the fact. He knew that he tried to be pleasant.

"Let me ask you, is there any real cause?"

"Oh, apart from Vickers, who isn't as bad as he looks, and Philetus——"

"You are stern at times."

"Do you think so?"

"And they say—well, hard and haughty."

"Am I?"

"I think not, except in manner."

"But that is the only way in which haughtiness shows. Honestly, I do not mean to be haughty. I suppose it is education; perhaps, too, a matter of caste. Why do you live up here?" he added, abruptly. "Why not go away?"

"I cannot afford to go," she said, simply, and went on sewing.

He made no reply, but sat looking over at the sweet, proud face and nimble hands.

"You are horribly frank," he said, at last.

"Am I? That is a matter of character, I suppose, and also, perhaps, of this open out-door life away from all social bonds. I often wonder if it is good for one. It simplifies life in a way."

"Yes, here it suits, or seems to. If to be unconventional always simplifies life, I doubt. But habits are strong fetters. I find no effort needed to take

up anew even the absurdities of our most conventional life. As to worse things, it is as hard really to barbarize the civilized as to civilize the barbarous."

"Gracious, what a formidable statement!" said Bessy. "You should write books and put in these wise things with portraits of the aborigines, Paul and myself."

"It is rather late," he laughed. "The book is written, and you are left out. I wrote a book once, but it was only a memorandum of unusually interesting travel."

Men who wrote books were rare in this country at that date.

Mrs. Preston looked up. "Might I see it?"

"Perhaps, some day. If——"

"If I am good, I suppose."

"You are always good. You will be better if I may smoke." He never failed to ask leave in her house, or in Miriam's, which constantly surprised the ex-actress, who said to her friend Mrs. Preston that he was a man had no power to make himself comfortable. She slightly despised the condescension of his asking, and felt it to be what she called a come-down for a man. To ask leave to smoke in that rough land was like asking leave to breathe.

"Oh, smoke, by all means," said Bessy. "I might bargain that there should be no pipe until we saw your book. Have you no sense of the cruelty of overtaxing a woman's curiosity?"

He smiled, well pleased, as he packed his meerschaum, then went to the fire and chose a brand and blew it bright and lit the pipe, a nice picture

with his head up and back, the tawny moustache, clear skin, and wavy hair aglow as the ruddy pipe-light flashed over them.

"The book you shall have. It kept me away to finish it. Ach, that and other things. When I am gone, a copy will come for you. I thank you for my good pipe. It is a benediction."

She knew easily what this man wanted and did not want. She thought with a fierce pang how often Paul, the husband, had puzzled her. He had seemed to speak a moral language other than that she knew. As for Riverius, she understood almost always or happily guessed beyond. In little and large things she mysteriously apprehended him. Now she knew that he did not want to talk of his book and that he was, as usual, shy of speech as to all that personally concerned himself.

"I can wait," she said, quickly. "I know I shall like it." When he was away,—yes, it would be better then. She would read it twice. And of late she had got a German dictionary and much bettered what had always been a fair knowledge of that tongue.

"I shall like you to like it," he returned, simply. "And to go back to what we were discussing, I suppose old countries must have conventional laws, but sometimes I envy the personal freedom of your half-tamed land. A man may do so much more as he likes, and"—he hesitated—"as—as seems best and most right. Sometimes one rebels. I felt that once and quite enough, but since I have been away I have felt it more. Do you think a man ought

to be ashamed of yielding to what he knows are absurd social rules, the growth of centuries, things that have obtained the despotism of instincts?"

"I hardly understand you," said Bessy. "You should put it more clearly." She was really at a loss.

"Ach! I talk foolishness."

"No, only half sense. You are, I should think, a man likely to do what you know to be right."

"But I do not know. That is the trouble."

"Will not time help you?" She was getting more and more uneasy and more and more dubious.

"Time brings in too many counsellors, and there is foolishness in that, as we know. Might I put a case to you? You are of all women I ever knew the most capable of being just. I——"

"I would rather not," said Bessy, decisively.

"Perhaps you are right," he returned, moodily. "And yet you will pardon me, I am sure. I am buffeted about by a mob of motives, and it is hardly fair to talk as I have done, giving half knowledge and craving whole advice." She was silent, and he went on abstractedly: "My young life on a great estate was bad for me. I was too much with inferiors. Eton was better; and my army life, I suppose, helped again to make me despotic."

"No,—positive, authoritative," she interposed.

"Well, that, if you please. As to my brief experience of diplomacy, I hated it, and when my uncle's death made me independent I began to wander, and now here I am, a rolling Saxon stone." And he laughed. "You have long had a friend's right to know more of my life, but——"

"Oh, I understand," she said, smiling.

"I believe you do, always, wonderfully."

"Thank you," she said, frankly. "You are going away——"

"Yes, but I hope to return in summer. You will not quite forget me?" And he rose.

"I shall not," she said, looking up. "But if I were in any risk of forgetting the only friend chance has sent me, Paul would hardly let me. You are his one hero. Really, it is amusing to see how much he thinks of you."

"Ah! that is not bad flattery. How can one have too much of such friendliness? Tell him a good-by for me."

"He will be up to see you off. And so you are going? Well, good-by again."

He said he would get away early,—a man would carry his traps,—and so left her.

Mrs. Preston sat awhile, her work in her lap, thinking. Never before had Riverius talked as much or as nearly of his own affairs. What had he meant? A subtler or vainer woman might have guessed his riddle and in the closeness of self suspected the nature of it. She was incapable of these sudden feminine suspicions as to another, but was more competent to reason out some comprehension of his dimly-seen difficulty. At last it came upon her with the force of a blow. Was she directly concerned in his indecision? She flushed. Annoyance, pride, distinct anger at the position, in turn affected her. More and more disturbed, she went to bed, and lay awake, thinking, and little knowing

that at the same time Riverius was walking to and fro in his cabin, as much troubled as herself. He packed his valise, put away many articles, locked the trunks he was to leave behind him, and then stood before the fire, reflecting. He wished that he had ended his doubt when he was last in America. Now it was harder; and yet his profound sense of obligation to Mrs. Preston, which had once almost annoyed him, he gladly felt was merged in a general conviction of the need his life had for this woman. It was a more healthy state of mind. Natures like his resent obligation, and acknowledge no capacity of requital. But love pays all debts, and he was close to the belief that all else in life was nothing without this woman, and was fast becoming reconciled to having owed his life to her. He was helped, too, by the assurance he felt that her gentle soul seemed to have utterly forgotten the service.

CHAPTER XIII.

Riverius left on a Saturday, and the day seemed of the longest to Elizabeth Preston.

All strong emotions have their sequent moods of tire, elation, or depression. To-day she was helpless in the grasp of active discontent,—ill pleased with herself, unreasonably displeased with Riverius. The wind blew warm from the south. A deluge of rain cleared the trees of the ice and snow, and the heavy air seemed to foster her mood of melancholy. As a rule, she was unirritable, and of an easy natural gentleness. Saint Temperament is a good saint; but now she was short, even with Paul, cross to Becky, and more and more vexed with herself, as she recalled the conclusions to which an intelligent study of herself had brought her. But, reason anew on it all as she might, her mental machinery was too good to evolve for her any of the fallacies with which lower natures cheat themselves. There are certain truths which, like the eyes of a fair portrait, follow us implacably.

The Sunday which came after that unhappy Saturday Bessy long remembered. All day, into the afternoon, it rained hard, and Paul and she stayed within-doors. The lesson of the day, and the psalm, were read in their usual routine, and then Paul loitered over a book, or, only half attentive, looked up or went to the door to see if there was

any prospect that the steady down-pour would ever end. At times he put the neglected author aside and chatted with his mother, who gave him, this day, but a divided attention.

It was now suddenly borne in on the boy's mind that she looked very young. Of late he had been half aware of a fresh touch of youthful gayety in her ways and manner. She had taken with the daily bread of life a sudden draught of its elixir. He said, with a little shyness (as if it were a delicate matter), "How old are you, mother? I was wondering, yesterday."

Bessy put down her book and smiled. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't rightly know. Mr. Riverius said—he said I was awfully big to be your son."

"Mr. Riverius is very impertinent, Master Paul. You are a pair of gossips. Am I—do I look so very old?"

Paul had the well-mannered child's dislike to hearing a parent spoken of as old.

"Old! old!" he returned, reproachfully. "He said no such thing; and I didn't say it." Then he let fall his book and went over and kissed her. "I do think you are so pretty, mother. I asked Mr. Riverius once if he didn't think you were pretty; and what do you think he said?"

By this time Bessy began to be conscious of having more blood in her face than was pleasant, and, since, like murder, blushes will out, she feared detection: they did not seem fully to explain themselves. She was getting annoyed.

"I am sure," she said, quickly, "that Mr. Riverius never meant you to repeat his talk."

"Oh, but it wasn't anything much. He just said——"

"No matter what he said." Nevertheless she was as eager as a child to know.

"But he said I was foolish,—that when I grew up and saw many women I would know better."

"Oh, indeed!" said Bessy. "Was that what he said? I cannot see why you made such a fuss over it."

"Oh, but that wasn't all!" exclaimed Paul, considering that now she had given him leave to speak. "He said you were noble-looking, and that you had a woman's head and a child's heart. I think that was very nice of him."

"I think it was," said Bessy, humbly. "But never tell him you told me. He would cease to talk to you as a friend if he thought every light word was reported to me. Remember, Paul."

The manner of the rebuke was stern, the face whence it came was joyous.

He stood beside her as he spoke, looking up. "You aren't angry, mother?" he said. "I didn't mean—I——"

"Nonsense!" she cried, and caught him in her arms and kissed him again and again. Usually to him she was gently affectionate. The little outbreak of demonstrative tenderness had more sources than the boy could have dreamed of.

"There, go," she cried, laughing, and pushing him away.

"The rain is over. It is clearing. I think I shall walk down to the mill. The hill-slopes will not be as bad as the level."

With a word or two more, he left her.

She rose and looked out.

The cabin felt close. One has in-door moods, and out-door moods, in which it is punishment to be between four walls. She longed to be out and moving.

She caught up a chip hat and tied its flaps down to guard her from the increasing sunshine. Then she pinned up her skirts, being minded to walk at ease, and went on to the porch.

The rain had fallen all day from a windless sky, gradually becoming less and less, till it was now but a white mist in the lower air, and of purer whiteness because of the westering sun yet high above it. Two or three inches of soft snow were on the ground, and here and there deeper drifts, wet and treacherous. The air was strangely warm. She looked down at her stout shoes, buttoned her jacket of squirrel-skins, the product of Riverius's skill, and, standing, wondered at the beauty of the scene before her.

A mood of elation had taken the place of the depression of the day before. Looking to and fro, she had a joyous sense of being in just relation with the still day, the well-bathed woods, the misty whiteness of the sunlit haze. She was too happy for successful analysis, yet she tried, for a sweet moment, to make out the sources of her pleasurable mood. But the motions of the heart can no one

self-understand, or watch in the mirror of consciousness, any more than one can see his material eyes move in the glass which seems so truthfully to reflect them.

She stood thinking a little while, and then got away from the faint effort to see herself, and surrendered to the bribes of a perfect day.

A positive sense of health and vigor of mind and body possessed her. Crossing the clearing, she entered the woods. Everywhere she saw the blackened tree-trunks and noted how the mists were swiftly disappearing in the absolute stillness of the air, in which not a twig stirred overhead. Between the net-work of branches the blue sky was visible in its rain-washed purity of hue. Noticing, as singular, the quietness of the forest-spaces, she came of a sudden into a rather open grove of firs, spruce, and young pines, and gave a little shiver of pure joy. On every pendent needle, and at the tips and edges of every naked twig, the quiet, slowly-ceasing rain had left beads and fringes of clear water-drops. Through these the sun cast its white light, so that it split into a million little fan-like expansions of colors. Everywhere about were inconceivable myriads of jewels hung from twig and stem and pendent pine-needles. In all her wood-life she had never before seen this rare and lovely sight, for which that unfrequent thing, a windless slowly-falling rain, is indispensable. Its splendors matched her mood of joy. She wished for Paul, and then for Riverius, and went on smiling and happy.

Now in a hollow the mist lay like little white lakes, and now a bank of beaded brown moss caught her eye, and now the stateliness of some single pine surprised her with its look of authoritative vigor.

Walking swiftly and with keen enjoyment of the use of wholesome limbs which knew not tire, she descended the slope which led to the mill-site.

The building stood in a clearing where trees and shrubs had been cleanly cut away for fear of the ever-dreaded accident of fire. The framework partly hid the opposite bank. Stepping aside, intending to cross the brook, she paused abruptly.

On the farther shore stood Philetus, erect, bareheaded, silent, looking up at the sky, his sightless eyes unmindful of the sun.

For a moment she was about to speak, but something in his manner excited her curiosity, and she waited, watchful.

The keen ears of the blind man detected the noise of her step.

"Who is there?" he said.

She remained silent, until, thinking himself deceived, he looked up again, his lips moving as if in whispered speech. At intervals he passed a hand quickly across his brow or turned his head as if to listen. At last he spoke. Alone as he thought himself, some stringent passionate need forced from his lips the troubling results of thoughts too keenly felt for silent guard.

Bessy instantly knew herself to be in the position of a listener who has no right to hear; but also a

certain fear, or rather awe, controlled her,—something more than mere curiosity.

Many times before, she had noticed as singular his increasing habit of moving his lips, as if speaking things which had to find their way into some form of speech.

At least it was thus, and justly, that she explained this inarticulate speech, which was generally accompanied by an expression of sombre intensity of self-occupation. The next instant he spoke, at first in a broken whisper, but in a moment clearly and in a full loud voice:

"Don't he say as vengeance is his? and isn't it writ as he will repay them as does his justice on the wicked?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bessy, shocked at his critical analysis of that terrible text which makes vengeance the unshared property of God.

Her faint cry caught the quick ear of Philetus. "What's that? Who's there?" he said.

She made no answer. For a while he moved to and fro among the trees, seeming at last to forget his alarm. By and by he came out again to the brook-side, and leaned moodily against a dead tree shivered by lightning, now and then feeling its broken bark, here and there, with the restless fingers of his right hand. Soon the lips moved again, then were at rest, then moved more freely, and, as before, broke at length into passionate speech:

"'He has said to me in the night season, Burn; he has said to me in the daylight, Slay; the woman that deceiveth shall surely die; the man that be-

guileth shall perish; fire shall follow him, fire shall devour his substance.' It's gettin' clearer. Thar's this here tree as he smote with lightnin', or he might of minded to rot it with worms, or vex it with galls, or put it in my head to ruin it with an axe. Ain't it him all the same as does it?"

The idea appeared to please Philetus; a sense of satisfaction was visible on his face; he seemed to have found for himself a reasonable justification. Leaving the blasted tree, he moved to the brook, felt with his foot for the planks, and crossed them steadily.

He came straight towards Bessy, and seemed to regard her so fixedly that she could hardly escape from the feeling that he saw.

Not two yards away he paused, she silent, hardly daring to breathe. For the first time, Philetus appeared to her as a possible source of evil, and with startling clearness she comprehended his condition and read but too plainly the meaning of his words.

He was so near that he could almost have touched her, when he spoke again. "Voices by night and by day,—voices,—voices." And so, with his head in the air, well set back after the way of the blind, he moved through the woods and towards Bessy's distant cabin, muttering as he went.

At times he paused, hearing in his ears cries as of urgent imperative counsellors. There were moments of doubt, but the incessant is a terrible despot; and ever and ever, by day and by night, strange whispers were as an eager, restless atmos-

phere round about him. He answered, as they spoke, or made comments under his breath, as if fearing to speak aloud.

Behind him at some little distance came the woman, anxious, pitiful, no longer afraid; for many things cast out fear.

Philetus kept his path steadily athwart the forest, now touching a barked tree, now pausing, and soon settling his doubts so as for a while to move on as if certain of his way. Cultivated capacities enabled the blind man to move at ease where mere untrained eyes had been valueless.

Woodmen find it hard or impossible to tell you how, at night, they pass with directness through the darkened forest; and it would have been hard for Philetus to analyze the means by which he guided his steps. It was certain, of late, that he did it less well, finding it impossible at times to give the needed attention to the limited aid his senses afforded. Voices, none but he could hear, troubled and distracted him. For days they were gone or faintly heard, and again, as now, they screamed in his ears wild and eager counsels.

He stopped, turned around, touched one or two trees, and then, at last, stood still. As Mrs. Preston cautiously came near, she saw that he wore a look of painful puzzle.

He said aloud, after his frequent fashion of self-communing, "I'm a-losin' my cunnin'; 'tain't nat'ral I should git so bothered. Nothin' 'ain't happened; here's me, and here's the wood, and I'm lost. I'd hate Consider for to know that."

As he ceased to speak, Mrs. Preston called aloud,—

"Is that you, Philetus? How very lucky! How should I ever have found my way in this ridiculous tangle?"

As she spoke, she came to his side.

"Mornin', Madam Preston," said Philetus. "Rightly, it ain't mornin'; but, bein' blinded, a man don't keep just 'count of time. Lost your way, did you say?"

"Yes. It isn't easy, Philetus, and it is getting well on in the day, too; I never was forced to camp out alone, and this time you will save me."

"How you city folks git dazed like, and wood-wild, is past comprehendin'."

For a moment a mischievous desire to insist on his leading the way crossed Bessy's mind; but another glance at the perturbed face checked her mirthful purpose.

"How absurd it is!" she exclaimed. "Why, if I had only turned half around I should have seen the two burnt pines at the turn of the lower ox-road. Come, Philetus; I shall not need your help. How is Miriam? There's the ox-road."

He followed her, answering as he went that all was well at home. Of a truth, her coming had been a vast relief. He could never have brought himself to own that his boasted wood-craft had failed him. As to this, and some other matters, he was singularly vain. They turned into the ox-road, and could now walk side by side.

"Where were you going, Philetus?" she said.

"I was a-wanderin'. Of a Sabbath I like to go to and fro in the woods, I've got to be that uneasy at home."

"What makes you uneasy?"

He turned his head as if to look at her.

"Did I say as I was uneasy?"

"Yes; that is what you said."

"Well, I am. I'm that pestered. Do you think the devil can talk loud in a man's ears so's no man else can hear? Oh, the tongues he must know!"

"Does he talk to you?"

"I never said it."

"I think people get such fancies; and perhaps whiskey helps to make them. He seems far away this quiet Sunday. The woods are still and cool with the rain, and all the leaves are shining, and the birds are calling, and the squirrels are busy, and over us the white clouds are drifting, and now above it is blue, and now a gray-white, through the rifts in the woods. The peace of the woods, Philetus, seems to me to pass all understanding."

As she spoke, a gentle look of calm came over his face.

He had the rare love for nature which seems to be born in some, and which no education can produce, and he was thankful because of the pains she took to make him aware of the woodland beauty.

He was now quiet in mind. At all times Bessy controlled him. There is something delicately fine in the way certain natures act one on another for good. The goodness of mere commonplace people is often valueless; the setting is something.

He said, "Yes, ma'am. There's texts that has no need to be bob-tailed with sermons; there's texts that preaches themselves; and when a man says to me, 'the peace of the woods,' which might be the same as God's peace, or jus' a part of his peace,—when he says 'that passeth all understandin',' it jus' gives a man the notion of what a small little thing it is, that there understandin', and how it gives out, like, when it gits sot to studyin' God Almighty. I 'ain't really had no peace these few days. There's a singin' and a sayin' and a counsellin' in my head like to drive me mad. Come an hour, it's clean gone, like as it never had been. That's peace,—God's peace. Fact is, it does seem 's if all right honest-minded peace might be his, anyways. It ain't a thing of understandin', and you did kind of make it plain to my blindness. Now, Myry 'ain't got that gift at all. Why, Mrs. Preston, she don't hardly know a pine from a poplar; and when I told her last week the turkey-foot ferns was a heap more like peacocks than turkeys, she never knowed what I meant; and the pride of the things! it jus' sticks out!"

"Well, she can see a cobweb far enough, Philetus. And who can beat Myry's rolls? I couldn't make one of them if I were to study a year."

"Might be," said Philetus, complacently. "I kin cook a bit myself." He was reflecting, not unpleased, upon the range and variety of his own gifts, and moved along smilingly.

"This is the ox-road," said Bessy. "Wasn't it stupid of me to lose myself? Come home with me

and have supper; or shall you go back home before dark?"

"I carries my night round with me always. It don't make no difference to me what's the time of day. Folks don't git used to thinkin' that."

"Of course; I knew. Will you come?"

"No; I'll go back. What was that thar noise I heerd?"

"Noise. I heard nothing."

"Thought I heerd it. Wasn't nuthin', I guess."

But his face grew suddenly anxious, and his head turned aside as if to hear. He at once suspected that what he heard had been one of the many noises which bewildered his brain, and he became instantly cautious, reticent, and suspicious.

"Sit down a little," said Mrs. Preston. "I am in no haste. Here, on this log." And she plucked at his sleeve.

Hesitating a moment, he sat down.

"Was you wantin' me to bide fur anythin' pertickeler?"

"No, no; nothing, except that I wanted to ask you what is the matter with you of late. You mutter to yourself; you speak aloud at times and say such strange things; you look so disturbed, and——honestly, Philetus, what's the matter?"

"Oh, it ain't nuthin'."

He was at once on guard. Like all persons with his peculiar form of mental trouble, he was very frank until taught by experience that anybody disbelieved him. Then he became cunning, watchful, indisposed to talk of his torments or temptations.

"You are not speaking the truth, Philetus. We have been good friends, and now I want to help you. By this time you must know how much I want to help you."

"I 'ain't no need," he said, rising hastily. "I guess it's wearin' on towards evenin'. I must go."

"But, Philetus——"

"I 'ain't the time to bide. I left Myry alone. Good-evenin', Mrs. Preston."

She made no further effort to stay him, and he strode away through the woods, leaving her seated, deep in thought, on the crumbling log.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEEK passed by, and then another, and the too eventless life of their cabin continued. The first day of spring had lured Bessy to a seat under the porch, and, quite alone, she sat now sewing, now letting her work fall on her lap and staring into the woodland spaces as if in their depths were answers to her questioning fancies. At last she heard Paul's voice, and saw him tumble himself over the snake fence in his haste, and then beheld him, too breathless to speak, at her side.

"Mother! mother!" he exclaimed.

"Take time," she said. "Be quiet. Wait. Now, then, what is it?"

"The mill is burned down. I knew it would be."

"That is bad news," she said.

"Yes, and Mr. Riverius away, and no one at work there."

"Why, Paul, it must have been set afire by some one maliciously. Was it still burning?"

"No. It might have been done some days. It's off the ox-roads, and no one lives near it. Philetus is the nearest."

"Philetus!" she said.

"Yes. What's the matter, mother?"

"Nothing. I must go in and write to Mr. Riverius. My letter can go to Pierson's camp. That is the quickest way."

Then she went in. She wrote at once to the German, merely telling him of the loss. Her own mind was pretty clear as to the author of the mischief, but she was not altogether certain, and she saw no good in detailing her suspicions. Nor were these to remain quite undisturbed. The day after her letter had gone, she heard the voice of Philetus in the kitchen. Of late he rarely came to the cabin, except to use her ox-cart to fetch in the wood he was chopping. Now he was deep in talk with Becky, who had asked him what he thought had made the mill burn down. Mrs. Preston called him.

"Good-morning, Philetus," she said. "All well at home?"

"Yes. We ain't ill off, thanks to you, ma'am. Might be harder times."

"I heard you speak of Mr. Riverius's mill."

"It was spoke of to me."

"Yes, I know. Who set that afire, Philetus?"

"Lightnin', maybe."

"Nonsense!—at this season."

"I've seen lightnin' afore, in February."

"But we have had none."

"That's so." And he was silent.

"I think, myself, Philetus, that it was the work of malice."

"No, no; not malice. God's judgment ain't malice."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, ther's people as thinks he deserved it,—him that owned that mill."

"What?"

"Else how could it have chanced?"

"It did not chance. You all hate him. The more kind he is to you, the more you hate him. Some one of you did this to hurt a man you dare not face. Some coward did it. Perhaps 'twas that wolf Ance, who remembers his punishment."

"'Twasn't Ance."

"Why do you say so? How do you know?"

"'Tain't like Ance."

"Do you know who did it?"

"If I do, I ain't minded to say. Him as done it might have been a firebrand in the hands of the Lord."

"Stuff! No, you cannot go."

He was moving away. She laid a hand on his arm. He paused.

"Was it you who burned the mill?"

"No; I didn't do it."

"You would not lie to me, Philetus: that I am sure of."

She was glad of his denial, yet puzzled and doubtful.

As she spoke, he went away, without uttering another word, and presently crossed the clearing, and, entering the woods, sat down on a stump. By and by he said, aloud, "When the hand of God air on a man, and he air a-speakin' to him and a-preachin', that thar man he does as he's bid. 'Tain't him, but the Lord. I said it wasn't me, and it wasn't."

After this logical settlement with conscience he

lit his pipe and went back tranquilly to his work in the pines.

The news of the burning of the mill and also of Riverius's sudden departure had been much discussed in the camps, where his famous victory over Ance had excited great amazement. A few believed he had left in fear of further trouble, but the common sense of those who had seen his battle led them to take another view.

It cannot be said that his absence was felt. His wood-gangs worked as usual, his money was duly received, and his men paid, but his reserve and tendency to hold himself aloof had made him far more disliked than much worse peculiarities would have done. Philetus was glad of his absence. He more than any one else was annoyed at the German's personal disinclination to accept him on even terms, and now, at least, he would be at ease as to Miriam for a time, for as to this Philetus had a feeling which certainly passed the line of healthy thought. The blind are suspicious, and never since Phil had overheard their laughing talk had he been quite free from the feeling referred to. Miriam's moodiness and tears, really due to the persecution of Ance and his influence on her husband, the latter put to the credit of the German, and the malevolent effects of a fixed idea were becoming more and more serious. The mystically minded are of all men the most apt to be illogical, are above others prone to be disturbed mentally by the permanent entertainment of a false belief which seems at last to become a part of the structure of the mind and

to affect all its decisions. Moreover, Philetus had a vast conception of his own sagacity, and greatly overestimated his capacity both to observe and to reason. His chosen comrades either flattered him or, as in the case of Ance, found in his beliefs a cover for their own schemes. In the domain of morbid psychology the terrible effects of these absolute and false ideas are well understood, and they are among the many causes which lead to inexplicable crimes. As to money, Philetus was, on the whole, easy, as Mrs. Preston was still able to give him employment and now and then to help his troubled wife.

Meanwhile, the spring went by, and they rarely had news of Riverius. It was late in May, and, moved by a visit from Miriam, who had come over to beseech Mrs. Preston to speak to Philetus of his increasing ill temper and bad habits, Bessy went out into the woods a mile or so from home to seek the woodman. The day was pleasant. In the deeper hollows among the rocks a little snow still lay. The arbutus was ripe again, and the dogwood lit the woods anew. A pleasant calm was on all her being, a mood which made her light of heart with some assurance that for her life was not yet over. She went along gayly humming a song, and presently saw Philetus sitting on a log, his face in his hands.

He turned, rose at her coming, and said, "I heerd your step, ma'am. What might you want?"

"Sit down," she said, seating herself. "I want to talk to you." He obeyed her silently.

"I am troubled about you of late, Philetus," she said, kindly.

"And you ain't any more than I am. Things don't go 'long as the Lord meant 'em to go. Myry does nothin', 'most, but cry and jus' go round stupid like. Somethin's on her mind. And the little one ain't half looked arter, and I'm jus' done out with 'em."

"Perhaps you are the cause, Philetus. You go about with bad men. You drink. Oh, don't stop me. You do. You half do your work. What is the matter?"

"Ef I drink, it's because I'm in trouble," he said; "and a man can't work ef he's got things on his mind."

"What is it that troubles you?"

"I don't keer to talk it over. A man's bothers is best kep' to himself."

"Have I not been your friend? Why not speak to me? Is it Ance?" she said, doubtfully.

"No; it ain't him."

"Well, who is it?"

"I ain't a-goin' to tell," he said, positively. "You ain't the one I'd soonest tell, anyways. Don't you go to ask me, nuther. I can't talk about it. I darsn't think about it. It's that,—that," he said, tapping his head, "and it's made me do things I wasn't bid to do. It fetches me visions, in the night and in the day,—things I see in'ardly. Sometimes I think I ain't 'countable."

"You must be ill," said Bessy. "Why do you not stop drinking?"

"I can't do it. It ain't Ance. He's minded now to quit drink himself, but I ain't. It makes me comfortable, drink does. It puts away them visions."

"Nonsense!" said Bessy, authoritatively. "The drink is killing you, body and soul. You must stop. Once for all, it must stop. I cannot have a half-drunken man about, and I will not."

"I kin go," he said, quietly, lifting his axe and rising.

She was puzzled. To cast him off meant new trouble for wife and child.

"No," she said. "You must stay and try harder. I want to help, not hurt you."

"I know," he returned. "It ain't no use."

"It must be. Go on with your work here. Try to do it better, and pray God to help you. I know you will succeed."

He paused in thought. "Ain't a man got a privilege to right himself when there's somebody doin' him a wrong?"

"No; God rights all wrongs, soon or late,—all wrongs. But are you sure any one has wronged you?"

"I know it. God ain't more sure."

"Hush! I won't have you talking in that way."

"Well, a man's got to bide by his own acts. He's a fool to go on lashin' himself and jus' thinkin' and thinkin' ef he's done right."

"What have you done?"

"There ain't no law for to make a man tell ag'in' himself."

"I am not the law. What is it?" She began to be both troubled and suspicious.

"No, I know that, too; but I've done a heap of loose talkin' I wasn't minded to do, and I ain't goin' to do no more. Ef you want me to go I'll go, and ef you want me to stay I'll stay, and that's all ther' is of it."

"Well, I will say no more. Remember Myry and the child, and try to think over what I have said. When Mr. Riverius comes back I will ask him to give you work again." She had exhausted her resources.

"Ryverus!" he murmured, and then, in louder tones, "I don't do no work for him. He hadn't oughter give me work. He ain't comin' back soon, air he?" There was almost terror in his voice as he spoke.

"Why not?" said Mrs. Preston, surprised.

"I hate him!" he exclaimed. "Don't you be thinkin' I'm afeerd to tell him. I've been nigh it. I've been nigh it. Twice I seed him come to my house at night, and when I got up he was gone. What fetched him there? The Lord knows. I don't give no 'count of myself to nobody, but when you git Ryverus to ask me to work for him you'll be makin' a mistake."

"Are you crazy? What on earth do you mean by such nonsense? Let me hear no more of it."

"I've said enough, and too much," he returned. "Is it bide or leave, ma'am?"

"As you please," she said, much annoyed.

"Then I'll stay till he comes." And he turned

away, while she walked past him into the wood, deep in thought. Could he have burned the mill? —and why? Nothing that she knew or guessed explained the matter fully, but she saw clearly enough that Philetus was not quite well in mind. Strange he had always been, but his present mood was inexplicable, and quite unlike his former phases of oddness, in which there had certainly been nothing to cause anxiety. As concerned Riverius, it troubled her greatly; but what could she do? At least when he came she would tell him,—that was a clear and simple duty,—but, after that, how helpless she was! Had he deserved the evident dislike he had aroused among these wild lumbermen? She was not of the women whom love makes blind, but the very reserve and masterful ways of John Riverius were things she did not find unpleasant, although she could have wished that for his own sake he had been able or willing to suppress them at need. As to any just cause for the hatred Philetus had so frankly expressed, she was still at a loss.

A few days later, Miriam came over to thank her. The strong protest of a healthy, positive person had had for a time the useful value in the way of control which it temporarily exerts over persons in the state of mind which beset Philetus. The influence did not last very long; and when, the week after, Paul told her he had come upon Philetus in the woods near the burned mill, kneeling as if in silent prayer, her suspicions as to his share in the fire became stronger. She spoke of

them to no one, but, being a woman resolute as to any duty, went almost daily into the forest where Philetus was at work. One morning she carried him some trifle for the fair Ophelia or bade him come and eat his noon-meal at her cabin. Another time it was tobacco, of which he was fond. This persistency was winged with many motives, not all selfish. As long as she kept as it were touch of him, she saw that he was less moody and drank none. Resolute natures which know also how to be sweet exercise vast influence over men. The devil does not own all the sugar. With pretty cunning, Bessy put aside Riverius as if forgotten, and, taking Paul for company, chatted with Philetus of the woods and river and of natural things as to which he was curiously interesting, liking well to be questioned. Then, too, she enlisted Consider Kinsman, who, glad to be thought an ally, had mournfully, and with lack of comprehending it, watched his friend's degradation, much as an intelligent Newfoundland dog might note with vague sadness change in the master. The kindly task she set herself did Bessy Preston good. She took trouble about it and gave it thought, and was sternly set upon winning her gentle game, as was natural to her as to all things, small or large, which had flavor of duty. The old fellow saw in part her object, but, liking the method, stood still, like a restless horse of a mind to have his way but flattered by the pleasant touch.

"How do you do, Consider? What a delightful morning!" She spoke to him slowly, and, as he

sharply watched the ripe curves of a mouth a little too large for mere beauty, he as usual understood her words.

He smiled. "I felt a woodpecker a-tappin' on a tree down near the brook. That's a sure sign of spring, ma'am."

"What do you call this?" said Paul, putting a plant in the palm of Philetus.

"It's a corpse-light," he returned, casting away the gray, dank stem of ominous name. "It's bad luck to have that there weed come early."

Paul laughed. "Bad luck! What is luck, anyhow?"

"Put a P before it, Paul," exclaimed his mother. "Luck is the excuse of the weak,—bad luck, that is." And she laughed at her little proverb.

"There ain't no luck, really," said Philetus. "Things is sot for to happen, and some things is sot for to git us ready. There's warnin's by beasts, and warnin's by plants, like as whispers of God afore he talks out things as is to be."

Consider regarded his friend with interest, wagging an approving head, and but partially catching the words, while Bessy, not thinking the talk wholesome for Philetus, said, "Give me his pipe, Paul."

The boy took it from the old man's pocket, whence, as usual, it protruded a well-blackened bowl. Bessy filled it from a pouch in her lap and handed both to the woodman. "I have brought you some excellent tobacco," she said.

"And I just done mine. How you women know

things is past believin'." Then he struck a match on his corduroys, and drew a long draught of the pleasant weed.

"What's this?" he said, suddenly. "That's Ryverus's baccy. Knowed it, I did! None for me! none for me!" And he absently emptied the pipe and extended his hand with the pouch to the giver. Paul looked his surprise, but Bessy at once threw out the tobacco and came to the blind man's side. It was as he had said. Riverius had left on her table by chance a package of the brand he commonly smoked.

"I thought it might be too weak for you," she said. "I made the pouch. Here it is. I have emptied it. I will get you some stronger tobacco."

"Made it for me?" he returned.

"Yes."

"I didn't have no notion to offend," he said, simply. "Smells is awful 'minders. They've power as is wonderful for to fetch back things as ther's no reason for considerin'."

"I have noticed that," she returned. "Remind me to fill the bag. How is Miriam?"

"Oh, she's bettered some."

Bessy smiled, well pleased. "And Ophelia?"

His face lit up. "Oh, she's all right. She's jus' a-noddin' and a-wavin' about like one of them Quaker-ladies in June time. You can't do nuthin' w'en that child's round but jus' 'tend to her, she's that exactin'."

"She is like a Quaker-lady," said Paul, who had looked on with interest, a little puzzled.

The blind man had pocketed the pouch and taken up his axe to go to work at the wood he was hewing. He struck right and left on the log at his feet, and then paused. "Paul knowed she was like a Quaker-lady, but I knowed it more in'ardly. 'Tain't every one gits a man's meanin'."

"No," said Bessy. "And there may be many meanings." She was humoring his mood.

"That's so. Ther's that about considerin' the lilies of the field. Now, that were real ripe preachin'. Ther's moral in 'em fur smell and fur seein'. Ther' ain't none for hearin'. Might mean we're to l'arn all 'bout 'em. All on 'em. All the multitude of things that grows. Some air like people. Ther's good and bad, and them as blossoms soon, and some as is patient and keeps you a-thinkin' the frost 'ill catch 'em and they won't come to nothin'. And then, fur to justify the Lord, they busts open and spites the frosty days with prettiness."

"Like golden-rod," said Paul.

"Ever anybody said your mother was like golden-rod, Paul?"

"Never," said Bessy, laughing. "It is a doubtful compliment."

"Ain't no compliment. It's true."

"Well, it's enough for to-day. Come in at noon and get your dinner, and bring Consider."

"All right, ma'am. I guess I've lost you time enough. I'd best fell a tree now. Turn about, work and words." And he brought his axe down on the trunk at his feet, dexterously lopping branch

after branch of the prostrate giant, while Paul and his mother walked away.

Of late Philetus had been at his best. Mrs. Preston was trying to keep before him the ripe fruit of the famous knowledge-tree and to hide the immature product which is evil. But his darker hours were ever near at hand.

June came, crowned with laurels, and with it a letter, brief as usual, to say that John Riverius would be with them in early July. He would bring the book, and Paul must write what else they needed.

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW days later, Miriam came, at Mrs. Preston's request, to make a brief stay with her, and a shake-down was made for her and the small Ophelia in the sitting-room. Paul liked it less than did the two women. The charm of the child's ways he cared for as little as boys do. So long as he built dams or corn-cob houses for her, Ophelia was content, but the least distraction of his attention excited her, and then he was never let alone. She liked her little court, and gently intrigued or manœuvred to retain his fealty, gauging her likes very largely by the amount of attention she could obtain. Philetus never wearied of her, and was her willing slave. Her capacity for minute observation certainly came from him, and he valued it the more for that reason, while of the mother's peculiar charms of rosy fulness the dainty little person did not share as yet, nor had she happily any promise of being subject to the outbursts of anger to which the much-tried Miriam was at times given.

The third day of their stay Paul induced his mother to go a half-mile down the river to the mountain and see the laurel which now covered it and had given it a name, and also there was the great lumber-slide to see. The two women, used to exercise afoot, climbed slowly up the trail,

sometimes relieving little Ophelia by a lift, sometimes awaiting her slower progress and listening with smiles to her incessant prattle and constant requests to the much-tasked Paul to know the names of the flowers or to get her blackberries.

In one of the deep clefts between the hill-top and the river a sturdy brook ran, whitening as it fell, intent to find the river-level. On either side vast granite rocks, tumbled from the cliff above, lay in gigantic masses in and along the stream. From the far top of the gorge, the laurel, creamy white and pink, a mass of unimaginable tints, filled every available space, and seen from beneath was like a cascade of bloom, parting at the rocks, reuniting below, and glorious as colors that cloak the dying day.

The little party stood below at the brook-side, all more or less feeling the effect of the immense mass of rich hues made up by the double bloom of the lesser and larger laurel. The day was quiet, and the noise of the riotous brook alone broke the stillness as it leaped to view here and there among the mass of flowers and came boldly out at last, white with gathered foam, to pause as if for reflection in a little pool before continuing its journey. Miriam said it was just really too beautiful, and was like a theatre, only it wasn't so gay. As for Ophelia, she desired to be decorated with laurel and other flowers, and was soon as well garlanded as her namesake. She had a lively pleasure in arraying her small person. The next moment she discovered how the stamens of the

larger laurel can be made to spring and scatter the pollen; and this amused her until she found a bed of violets, when she got rid of her floral attire and sat down, smoothing her dress and inviting Paul to "fight violets," which consists in hooking the crook-like stems of two of these flowers and then by a jerk beheading one of them, the sound survivor being victorious for the time. Meanwhile the elder persons rested, chatted, or wandered about. Miriam's reference to the theatre as her highest standard of comparison amused Mrs. Preston.

"I should think that noisy stream was actor and action enough for you."

"It doesn't have any trouble with learning its part. That did use to bother me when I trod the stage. I sometimes think I would like to go and do it again. That child's got it in her, but, for all she's called Ophelia, she couldn't ever do that part the way I did. She doesn't get real angry or real sorrowful. I do think sometimes she makes believe. Do you think she could, Mrs. Preston?"

"I do not know. Children are dreadfully complicated. I think people who talk of the simplicity of childhood——well, I do not mean very little children, but like your girl—must see very little. When one comes to manage them they do not seem very simple."

"In that book of poetry you lent me, Mrs. Preston, it says they're nigher heaven than we are, and Christ he does say to let them come to him, just as if they would come to him of their own accord if we grown-up folks was to leave them alone."

"That sounds like Philetus," said Mrs. Preston, smiling.

"Well, he might have said it. When you live with a man has as much wisdom as Phil, you get so after a time you don't rightly know what's his and what's your own. I do mind that he said it showed how hard it was for us grown-up folks, or else Christ wouldn't have said, 'Suffer,' just as if it hurt us to let them go easy to him."

"Philetus is an interesting critic," said Bessy, knowing well what Riverius would have said in reply to poor Phil's explanatory comments on Holy Writ.

"Yes, he is interesting," returned Miriam. "If he had had a right good education there is no saying what he couldn't have done. But I don't think he'd have made anything of an actor."

"Hardly."

"That child might, though I don't consider the stage for her yet." She spoke as if Ophelia were grown up and had but to choose.

"It is scarcely a life one would desire for a girl. I have heard you say so, Miriam."

"You did; but, my gracious, Mrs. Preston, ain't anything better than some man like Ance Vickers, and sitting alone one-half the time, and—and winter nights, and frying salt pork, and living on long sweetenin' and bad flour? I tell you, I get right tired times. It ain't like having Hamlet talk to you, fool as he was. I always did think he was a fool. I used to want to tell him so."

"I wonder you did not," said Bessy, much de-

lighted. "However, as to the little one, there is time enough to think. Philetus is better, it seems to me."

"Yes, things are more comfortable, thanks to you, and if Ance would go away, and Mr. Riverius too, we would get along, I do think. I don't like to say it, but Phil just hates him. I can hardly speak a word about him; and I do admire to see him. I never saw a man hadn't been on the stage that held himself like him; and he's so gay, too. Phil's a heap wiser, but for amusing he don't compare."

"Take my advice and never mention him at home. Your husband is not well in mind, and is, I dare say, unreasonable."

"You've done him a heap of good, and I'll try to take your advice; but, bless me, I have a long tongue, and it's right hard to keep not saying this and not saying that. Men are worse than children."

"Well, perhaps. Come along, Paul. Come, Ophelia."

In a few moments a strange roar was heard above them, and Miriam started. She was always inclined to be nervous. "What's that?" she said.

"Logs on the slide," answered Paul. "There, you can see it."

"Tell me," said the small inquirer at his side.

"Well, if there was only just a hill and the river down below, they could cut a smooth place and roll the logs down it. That's a 'brow.' But if there are deep places like this to cross over, then they make a slide."

"Like in winter?" said Ophelia.

"No. You come, and I'll show you."

Ten minutes brought them out on the cleared rocky summit, some eight hundred feet above the Alleghany. There was Rollins, with Ance and others, and a quantity of logs brought thither in winter on bob-sleds and lying about ready to be sent down to the river, to be made into rafts. The spring had been dry, and the jam above had prevented the coming down of the rafts, so that now, taking advantage of a "fresh," all hands were busy getting down logs and building these huge unwieldy structures. Back of the hill-top and away from the river, on a table-land, there had been a noble grove of pines, which when cut down it was hard to convey to the stream. To do so with least labor, a lumber-slide had been built from the hill-top. It consisted of a floor of roughly-squared timber with hewn sides a foot high. As this primitive freight-road could be carried on supports across the several ravines between the table-land and the river, it saved slow and difficult winter ox-sledding, and enabled the logs, started at the top, to glide swiftly to the stream. The course was slightly curved, and the final drop from the bluff some twenty feet into deep water.

As the women approached, Rollins and others spoke to them. Vickers nodded and said good-morning, and by and by edged over towards Paul, who had taken occasion to escape from the persuasive Ophelia. Ance was in a good humor, and not more full of whiskey than common. If on him

too frank Nature had set the mark of the brute in the ignoble nose and rounded ears, somewhere she had set, too, a more than brutish admiration of beauty and some faint sense of chivalry and fair play. His rare personal strength was his chief pride, and to know that until Riverius had overcome him he had been the unquestioned superior in fight of any man on raft or in camp gratified him greatly. The combination of qualities he possessed was ruinous. Paul regarded him with boyish dignity.

"'Ain't seen you sence that scrimmage," said Ance, grinning amicably.

"No," said Paul, prudently concerned to keep on good terms.

"Ef I hadn't 'a' bin awful full that time, he'd 'a' bin wusted. Jim Pearson 'lowed that last night,"—which was true, as it was rather unpleasant at times to contradict Vickers. "We'll have another bout some day, and then we'll see, maybe."

"Why, look here, Ance; you can't lick that man. He's got too much science."

"We'll see," said Ance. "Someway him and me's got to get even; and Ance Vickers ain't the man to hide it, nuther. I was a-wantin' to say to you thet I ain't goin' to keep you skeered about them hornets, and you're a right plucky boy. 'Tain't many boys would have come and wanted me to lick 'em. Don't you try no more tricks on me, and I'll say it's quits."

"All right," said Paul. He was, on the whole,

well pleased, having a dreadful memory of that cracking limb and the wicked hairy red face. But he too had his boy chivalry, and added, "I don't mean I'm on your side. Mr. Riverius is my friend. I'd stand by him any time." And he proudly felt that he had done so. "Oh, they're going to start a log!" And he ran away.

A movable derrick was so rigged as to swing a huge shorn pine on to the head of the slide. Then the chains were loosed, the wood-hooks let go, and the great inert mass started slowly on its way. In a moment it gained impetus, and presently slid with gathering velocity down the slide with a singular rasping sound which rose to a roar as it disappeared among the overgrowths. As it passed around the curve a little smoke showed itself, and then was heard the plunge into the river.

"Why does it make that smoke?" said the little maid, who was mounted on Consider's shoulder, acutely attentive.

"It's friction," said Rollins, smiling. "It would catch fire if we didn't look out."

"They have turned a spring into the slide, mother," said Paul, "half-way down. That keeps it from burning."

"Let Phely go down on that," said the enterprising young lady.

The men laughed, and Rollins said, "Ance went down on it once, seated on a shovel, for a bet; but I guess he don't hanker after it again."

Ance grinned: "Found it warm, like, I did. That 'ere shovel het up awful fast."

After seeing several logs go down, Mrs. Preston asked who had conceived the idea of making the slide. "Riverius done it," said Rollins. "Said he had seen them in his country. It's a great savin' of cattle." And after this they went home.

CHAPTER XVI.

The summer from May on had been dry. Rain had once fallen in June, but only once, and now the whole land was parched and thirsty. Mid-August came, and still no rain, and the trees were showing signs of wilting, while the brooks dried up and the wells gave out. The utmost alarm began to be felt as to fires, and no precautions were thought too great to provide against the disaster. Twice slight fires had arisen and twice had been in haste beaten out. As to the summer crops, they were ruined, and the parched earth, with wide cracks in field and pasture, confessed its longing for relief.

As yet, despite his letter, Riverius did not come.

One evening, with Paul, Bessy stood at the fence back of the house, contemplating her withered corn and shrivelled potato-vines. Suddenly a man she did not know said, "Evening, ma'am. Does one Riverius live about here? I fetched his letters from Olean."

"He is not here now," said Bessy; "but I will see that he gets them when he comes."

"All right." And he gave her a bundle of papers and letters wrapped in greasy brown paper.

"Are there any for me?"

"I don't know. Best to look."

"Go to the house, Paul," she said, "and give the man something to eat."

As they moved away, the letters fell out of the cover, and, gathering them up, Bessy leaned on the fence and turned them over to see if there were one for herself. "Ah!" she said, surprised. Usually heretofore all his letters had been directed to Herr Johann Riverius. Now all were addressed "To the Baron Johann Riverius," etc.

"That is it," she said, with quick perception. "His brother must have died while he was abroad, and now he is Baron Riverius." Did this widen the space between them? She knew well enough how little a title like that meant in many lands, and how much it meant in some. With all her personal pride, she did not untruthfully estimate her friendless place in existence, her poverty, her rough wood-life, and the effects against which she struggled hard for both Paul and herself. She had but a broken life and a burdened one to give. Did he want it at all? Yes, it might be so. Her womanly perceptions were delicately apprehensive. Had this change in his condition altered him? There might be reasons for that not altogether base, and her early days and strong good sense had given her power to feel and know that circumstances might make it difficult for him to do as he might desire. Trying to reverse their respective situations, she saw the matter still more charitably, even if with increasing pain. And suppose it lay in her power to win him,—a gentle task, from which all her pride of character shrunk,—would she do it? "I could

make him happy," she said, aloud. "I could do it. I would be good for him, too," she said, appealing to her reason. Then she rested her arms on the top rail of the snake fence and leaned upon them silent. "Will it ever be?" she murmured.

"Guten Abend, Frau Preston," said a familiar voice, and she turned with a start, blushing an honest red despite herself.

"I came from Smethport," he added. "How are you?"

"Very well, and most glad to see you."

"I have been long away,—too long; but I had much business."

"Come in and have some tea."

"Gladly. How you are all dried up! No rain, I hear, and much dread of fires. You should cut that long grass. It is gone worthless, and is too near the house. It would burn like hay. And how is my friend Paul?" He was in gay good humor.

"Here are your letters, baron," she said, demurely.

"Ach, you know that! Well, I should have told you. My brother died, and I am the head of the house. I wished it never; but it has come."

"And now I suppose you will go home?"

"I do not know. Yes, some time. I am very happy here. I do not love place and station and the harder forms of our social life. It sets cruel limits at times on one's will, and even on one's just desires."

"Why?" she asked, with absolute appearance of innocence.

"I do not mean that it does imperatively fetter a man; that depends; but it may make life difficult. That is all."

"I suppose so," said Bessy. "I remember your speaking of this once." She was amazed at her own audacity.

"And you refused to help me."

"I did. There are things no man should ask to have decided for him."

"You are right. You are always right."

And so they went in, and Riverius was noisily made welcome by Paul, and noted that the laurels were finished and other flowers added. After his supper he asked leave to smoke, as usual, and apologized for reading his letters. Now and then he looked up and said a word or two. "My vines are doing well. We have one of the best vineyards in Saxony. I should like to show you the hills from the garden. Ach! and we have had trouble with the government wood-inspectors. I wonder how the Herr Inspector would like it here. And how is the quaint Philetus?"

She felt that for the first time he had begun to let her freely into his life. She went on sewing calmly, a flood of joy in all her being.

"Philetus is, or was, better. He drinks less; but I do think that he is not quite right in his mind."

"In his mind?"

"Yes. He has what he calls visions; and, to speak frankly, he has come to regard you with an utterly unreasonable hatred."

"I am sorry, but it does not matter much. I mean to offer him a place to oversee some woodwork at my coal-mines in Pennsylvania. It is really on account of his wife and child, and because—well——"

"Well, because what?"

"Oh, only that I thought you would like it."

"I should," she said. "I should like it very much. Whether he will or not is hard to say. It does not appear to me a very available plan. At times he seems to me quite out of his head; and then his blindness. Here he is at home in the woods; but in a strange place among new people —it will hardly answer."

"I have thought of all that," he returned. "Of course you understand that I shall insist upon having Consider also. It would never do to break up that queer partnership."

"But if the thing fails,—if poor old Philetus prove unable to do the work you will expect,—what then?"

"What then? Oh, I should find some trifling task for him and regard him as a pensioner. The thing is to get him away from that drunken brute Ance. My plan may fail, but I mean to give them a chance. Change may help him, and with Consider to aid him I fancy that he will be quite able to do what little I shall want. At all events, we will try."

"We," thought Bessy.

"Besides," he added, gayly, "I have to begin to pay my debts to you. I am still reasonably honest.

Oh, I am in earnest," he added, watching her face. "It is serious."

"That is forbidden ground," said Bessy. "Pardon me, but it seems to me ignoble to be unable to accept a benefit without feeling it constantly as a debt; and—and do you think that in my solitary life your constant kindness, your thoughtful friendliness, have been nothing?"

"That is more debt," he said, laughing.

"Let us drop the subject. Your scheme for Philetus seems to me kind. It may answer, although, as I said, I have my fears. Whether or not he will accept is, as I suspect, rather doubtful. He is working here still; and perhaps if you could manage to see Miriam first it might be the better way." She hesitated to advise it, but then it would be only for this once.

"I will go to-morrow. I have the book for you. It is only a record of scientific travel in South America." Then he rose. "It is early, but I am tired." And he looked around him. "How pleasant to be here again!"

"You must miss the vineyards."

"Himmel! I wish they were under the sea, and the old castle and all. Gute Nacht."

Bessy sat still and worked on, smiling a little to herself at times, and happier than she had been for many a day.

It is sometimes fortunate when love is introduced by friendship. If love be blind, friendship, the true friendship of large natures, is not, and may be the firmest basis in matured persons for that

relation which is supposed to make keenness of mental vision impossible. Soon or late the best love must include a friendship as honest and respectful. The friendship of man and woman has been much discussed, and as much doubted, nor is it in its fulness with the young a very frequently possible relation; yet for those past their first youth it has or may have qualities which give it values far beyond a like tie between two of one sex. The woman friend must always feel some of the limitations which are imposed by her sex and from which she can never wholly free herself; but for the man her friend the bond has availabilities which no such relation to one of his own sex can give. There goes with it a possibility of confessing the delicacies of sentiment which he never inclines to lay open to his fellow-man. There are things he may wish to say at which the man may smile, but which to the woman are serious,—things as to which the friendly masculine is cool or which he regards but lightly. The men whose characters include certain feminine characteristics by no means unworthy of the highest male creations are rare, but give us, when they do exist, the noblest types of capacity for the fullest friendship. The man who has no woman friend is unfortunate, and lacks a part of that breadth of relation to his kind which liberal-minded men instinctively crave.

Very early in their acquaintance Riverius had once said to Bessy carelessly that some kind of love-ties are commonplace possibilities, but that capacity for friendship in its loftier range is the

rarer gift, and that no one makes a good friend to another who is not a true friend to himself. She had smiled, only half understanding him. Now she understood better. She had the gift, rare to passionate natures, of being able to stand aloof from her own feelings and to use her reason as she might have done that of a friend, and at present through her own self-knowledge she comprehended in a measure the man to whom she felt that she had given her unasked love. It was natural to Bessy Preston to feel that the nobleness of giving implied obligation to give. When this man fell at her door, and she had recalled him to life, she had pledged herself to an interest in what she had given. It is easier to give anew when one has once given than to give at first. As time went by, Riverius stood all the tests which an awkward situation and unusual conditions applied before the vision of a woman clear-sighted and thoughtfully on guard. His reticence as to himself would have annoyed some women. It pleased her. His indisposition to talk of himself she respected. He leaped no bounds abruptly, yet somehow each month she knew him better, and came at last to understand him as women do at times come to understand men. His faults she saw, therefore,—his too sure trust in himself, and the pride which made it hard for him to receive with gracious acceptance and easy for him to give generously. His intellectual contempt of the vague or pretentious she disliked, as needless, but the *rôle* of his better qualities her head had taught her heart, and thus, clear of brain

and lovingly generous, she gave him, slowly, respect, admiration, friendship, and at last knew of a sudden that she had been too prodigal and had given her love. At first this had made her unhappy, but of late she was anything but this. She felt, however, a growing need for self-control. She mistrusted the stormy passion of which she knew herself to be capable, and acknowledged with a wild joy that she was competent to love with such energy and intensity as once would have seemed to her impossible. Many such thoughts haunted her that night. At last she recalled some things which made her resolute that Paul should go with Riverius to Richmond's cabin. Accordingly, she asked the lad on the following morning to take to Miriam a small basket with some trifles which she had commissioned the German to buy for her.

While Paul filled his basket in the house, she stood outside at the door with Riverius. Chatting gayly, she trimmed the climbing roses and clipped off the dead leaves. Her graciousness of movement was seen to full advantage. Fuller health had given her breadth and color, and the riper curves of neck and chest suggested vigorous youth. There was, as he saw her, a dignified calmness in all her simplest acts which was typical of the woman's character. Riverius looked at her gravely, but with a keen sense of the mysterious changes which a little time had wrought. The traditions and prejudices of a life were crumbling in his joyfully-troubled soul, and he knew it. As she lifted

both hands to seize a branch, the noble vase-like curves of chest and bust startled him, and the faint vertigo of intoxicated senses overcame him for a moment. The feeling of weakness—and he disliked all such indications of want of self-control—did nevertheless please him. He laughed aloud; and he had the rare and gentle art of laughing well.

"What amuses you?" she said, without turning her head.

"Oh, nothing."

"Then you are delightfully easy to amuse. I used to wonder that you laughed so little; but I really think that you are improving,—absolutely improving."

"There is room in many ways." She made no answer. "What do you think?" he added. "Am I very naughty?"

"Well, they say so hereabouts."

"Oh, they say so. Do you suppose I care, unless——"

"But you should. That is one of your faults. There, you wanted to know. How these thorns prickle!"

"You mean that I do not enough consider the opinions of men. Was that it?"

"No, you do not, if they are socially beneath you. As to how it is with others, your equals, I do not know. I have no chance of knowing."

"And yet you are my equal."

"Am I? You are very good. I always thought I was your superior." And she smiled over her shoulder.

"You are," he said, quietly.

"And how? That is interesting."

"I will tell you. I am more unreserved than you. I do not at all mind telling you."

"Well?" Her heart beat joyous music in her breast. She liked the light talk and pretty little play at confessions, "the marge of perils sweet."

"You are unprejudiced, and I am full of prejudices. You are frank and unsuspicious."

"Ah!" she murmured.

"I am——"

"Pardon me, I did not ask for a comparative statement of vices and virtues."

"But, being penitent, as you see, I am disposed to confess."

"I do not like confessions."

"No."

"But I can stand any amount of abuse."

"And that I am incapable of."

"Yes, I always thought your character rather defective. If you had been a reasonably constituted man, you would not have watched me for five minutes trying to seize this branch, when with the least exertion——"

"And you want it badly?"

"Dreadfully."

"What will you give to have it?" The way, the tones, the playfulness, were all unlike the man.

"I do not want it," she said. "It is the part of wisdom to abandon vain efforts."

"Ach! not whenever I saw Mrs. Preston. You should have been a man."

"I wish I were!"

"Why?"

"I would get that branch."

"I thought you had given it up."

"Please to get it."

"If you will give me the rose I see on the tip."

"I will give you this bud."

"No, I want the rose."

"But why?"

"A bud is incomplete."

A slight womanly mutiny arose in her mind. "You cannot have it," she said. "The bud or nothing."

"Then nothing,' he returned, and, reaching up, drew down the branch.

"Thank you," she said, faintly.

He returned, gravely, "Perhaps you repent. I would wish that you do repent."

"I have not been wicked enough.—Ah, Paul, have you all the things?"

He said he was sure, and, with Riverius, who was suddenly serious and silent, walked across the clearing. They were a hundred yards away, and she watched them,—shall we say him? "Ah," she cried. "I should be ashamed of myself! I have been, I have been—silly? But how pleasant it was!" Then she looked again. They were in the woods. He seemed to her to be going away, away from her, and a flood of passionate blood surged hotly to her temples and overcame her. "Paul!" she cried, "Paul!"

He came back in haste, while Riverius stayed leaning against a tree-trunk, deep in thought.

"She loves me. Why did she play with me? Surely she knew."

In a moment or two Paul returned. "I don't see why mother forgets so lately. She wanted to send some flowers to Miriam Richmond, and she said I was to give you this one. I don't see what a man wants a rose for."

Riverius took the rose. It was full-blown. He turned and looked back, a morning dawn of joy in his face. Bessy was gone. She was seated in the painted room. "How could I do it?" she said. Meanwhile, Riverius strode along in silence. He had not counted on this abrupt surrender, but he did not undervalue the sacrifice it must have cost her pride. He knew that only of late had he been able to set aside the doubts and difficulties made for him by education and traditions, and he could not know how long it was since Bessy had learned with a certain dread that her heart had been given in advance. But now the benediction of a frank and noble love was on him. He smiled scornfully, remembering the barriers he had set in his own way. The sense of deep humility which goes with worthy loving came over him, and he walked on reflecting what now life ought to be. At last Paul's talk, which usually he liked, annoyed him, and he said, "Could you go to my wood-camp and ask James to come over to-night?"

"All right," said the boy; "but you will have to carry the basket and these roses."

"I will see that they get there safe. Tell your mother I sent you to camp. I shall be at home by supper-time."

Alone and happy in the uninterrupted opportunity to think, Riverius went on, and an hour later entered Richmond's cabin. It is quite certain that happiness agrees with some people, and that to some misfortune is surely productive of moral indigestion. Riverius was not a man easily swayed by external circumstance, good or bad. But what had overcome him now was a novel experience in his life, and affected him as great physical influences affect the material world, causing dislocations and rearrangements, shattering, dissolving, displacing, seeming to confuse. By and by in either case there come tranquillity, and permanent or temporary results according to the nature of the thing disturbed. Just now his answered love was to Riverius like sudden sunshine to a waiting world of ready spring-time things. Bessy had sped him on an errand of mercy. It should be done with flavor of her liberal graciousness. He liked the idea, and played with it pleasantly.

CHAPTER XVII.

As Riverius drew near the cabin, Mrs. Richmond came to the door. He was struck with her look of worry, and, as always, with the large-limbed robustness of the woman, and wondered a moment how she and the rugged blind man could have been the parents of the finely-made, quick-witted child who appeared of a sudden beside her.

"When did you come, Mr. Riverius?" said Miriam.

"Last night."

"Oh! that is why Philetus didn't happen to tell me."

"He does not know of my return. I have not seen him."

Turning, Miriam glanced hastily at the small noisy Yankee clock on the wall. It was but a little after nine. No one—certainly not Philetus—was likely to appear before noon. She might feel at ease.

Said Ophelia, promptly, "You got something in that basket for Phely. What you got in that basket for Phely? Give me some roses."

"The roses are for your mother, from Mrs. Preston. There is a doll for you, and a little book." Here he produced these articles, to which for the time Ophelia paid not the least attention.

"What else you got there?" When she found

there were no other matters of possible interest, she sat down and submitted the new doll to an accurate anatomical study.

"She has one leg longer than the other. What color are her eyes, Mr. Riverius?"

The baron was much amused. "She must have some French blood," he said. "Let her go away for a little; or shall we walk outside? I want to talk to you of some business matters best to be discussed alone." The fair Ophelia understood at once that she was to be separated for a time from her audience.

"Phely quite comf'able," she said. "Phely wants to stay inside."

"Take the doll and the book and go down to your baby-house and stay until I call you," said Miriam. "Until I call you. Do you hear, Ophelia?"

The young person searched a moment Mrs. Richmond's troubled face, and concluded to obey, being well aware that in certain of her mother's moods of late the large hands had been apt to be unpleasant. "Phely will pound the doll with a stone if she don't say her lessons," returned the maid, with a defiant air.

"Out with you! You just try any such naughty tricks! And don't you come till I call."

The mutinous, pretty little creature went down the slope, and at the far corner of the clearing seated herself by a miniature cabin, the gift of Consider Kinsman. Here, under the shade of a great maple, she was soon busy presenting to the

new doll a headless sister and a collection of snail-shells, stones, broken china, and corn-cobs. Meanwhile, Mrs. Richmond dusted with her apron a chair for her guest, and then sat down to talk with him.

"I have to be sharp with her sometimes, she's that persistent; and as to talking before her about anything you don't want known to anybody else, you might just as well tell it yourself."

"I have nothing very serious to say; but, on the whole, I did think it well to be alone with you. Really it mattered little."

"She'll stay now till I call her. What's the matter? Anything wrong?" Poor Miriam was in such a hopeless state of mind that any good news seemed to her improbable.

"I came over here to see you because I want you and Philetus to go and live on some lands of mine in the coal-country near Pottsville."

"But——"

"Wait a little, until I am through. I shall expect your husband to look after my lumber interests, and before long to attend to other duties connected with a mine I am opening. He will have a house, and be paid, I should say, about five times his present wages. Then there is a school quite near, and Pottsville not far away, and neighbors close by."

"Mr. Riverius!"

"One moment. I know that Philetus is not well. I know that to get him away from Ance Vickers is his only chance; and it seemed—well,

it seemed best to Mrs. Preston that I saw you first. If I were to talk to Philetus he would not understand me. At least that might be the case. This is all I have to say."

To his surprise, she made no reply, but sat looking out of the open door, some unusual twitching movements about the chin, her eyes filling too fast for natural drainage. Then came an outburst of sobbing, her face in her apron, the large, bare white arms shaking with the convulsive motions of the head her hands sustained.

"I ain't—used—to kindness—not—from men. I thank—thank you. Do—don't—think I don't thank you."

The German looked aside out into the sunshine. There was something uncomfortable about his throat. "Ach, Himmel!" he said, aloud. "Don't cry. What is it to make a fuss for?"

By this time Miriam had rubbed her face red and searched out the moisture in the corners of her eyes and set her features in order.

"You must excuse me, sir. I haven't cried, not that way, for many a day. There is crying that blesses, and crying that curses, and—and——"

"Please don't begin again," said Riverius, with all of a man's utter helplessness before a tearful face.

"I don't see why you want to do it. He—well, there's no use in hiding it, he hates you. I don't want to have you making him this offer and you not know that."

"But I do know it."

"Then you ain't like other men, that's all I've got to say."

The pride that made the husband's dislike seem to him but a trifle Miriam could not have understood, nor altogether Riverius's desire to help the weak who are in trouble through no wrong of their own doing, nor also his other motives. As to the German himself, it was but a small matter, and he was getting more thanks and more affluence of admiration than he relished.

"Mrs. Preston thought I had best see you about it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miriam, smiling a little. "Guess I'll thank Mrs. Preston when I see her. You're a good man, Mr. Riverius, and you just hate to be told it."

"Oh, don't!" said Riverius.

"It's no use. You've got to take it. When you shake an apple-tree and the pippins come a-tumbling down on your head you 'ain't any reason to complain. The quality of your mercy ain't strained, or it ain't strained through a fine sieve. I——"

The German held up a hand of appeal, shaking his head the while.

"Keep the rest for Mrs. Preston. I must go. When you have seen Philetus, if he is at all reasonable, we can talk it over as to details. Oh! and tell him I will take Consider also. I forgot that. It is essential. Good-by." And he put out his hand. She had a wish to kiss it. How could she show the gratitude with which her soul was full? Philetus would not like that. She dropped the

hand, stood before him, tall, shapely, pure white and red, with the look of woman strength in hip and chest, like some largely-modelled caryatid.

"God bless you!" she said. "God thank you! I cannot; I know, I know. God bless you both!"

He only smiled, lifted his cap courteously as to a lady of his own rank, and, turning, walked down the hill and was soon lost to her view in the trees as she stood and watched him. Then she too turned and went into the house and fell on her knees and prayed God with thankfulness as she had been unable to do for many a day. When she rose, more composed, the little maid was still out of her thoughts. By and by the mother glanced through a window, and saw her going to and fro, busy in a little world of her own creation. Miriam took a jacket of Phil's, and, sitting down, began to sew, and also, thus aided, to think, as women will at their work. Would Philetus accept? Oh, he must. And why was he so strange about Riverius and so careless about Ance? She profoundly admired the manly German gentleman, but she had always been a woman above reproach, and of late had been very careful never even to mention his name; yet the visions continued, and her husband had been wandering in speech at times, talking as if in his blindness the German had been hiding near the cabin. What did it all mean? She could not understand it. But now she must speak out, and make Philetus comprehend that the man was his friend and had never been other than just. She rose to call the child.

At this moment a shadow fell through the doorway. She leaped to her feet as Anson Vickers entered. "What do you want?" she cried, fiercely. "I told you yesterday I would tell Phil if you came again. Begone, I say! Go!"

"I won't hurt you," he said. "Lord, but you're a beauty! Come, let's talk a little. You be quiet, now, and I won't say nuthin' 'bout that ther' Ryverus. Guess ef Phil knowed how long he stayed here to-day, he'd wish he'd a pair of eyes to lay along a rifle-sight. He's a nice-lookin' man, that German."

If he meant to scare her he was sadly astray. A fury of rage, of ungovernable anger, arose within her. Gratitude, respect, sense of repeated insult, lent it fuel.

"You spy! you devil!" she cried; "you fiery beast, with your lying whiskey-fed tongue!" She turned aside with a swift motion, caught Phil's rifle, which she knew well how to use, cocked it, and, covering the amazed and now furious man, "Out, out, dog!" she screamed, "or I will kill you!"

Ance was courageous and unpractised in fear. A certain look of fascination lit up his bleared eyes and to the woman's instinctive appreciations coarsely spoke of horrible peril. She had never realized it as now. It disturbed her visibly. In an instant, stooping quickly to avoid the shot, he rose, seizing her hand and tearing it from the trigger. As he fell back, the rifle in his grasp, she caught at the barrel, and struggled while he strove

to wrench the weapon from her. She cried aloud for help, and only the distant child, hearing faintly, listened undisturbed and then went on with her play. The powerful woman was no easy prey. At last, cursing, he tore the weapon from her hands, which slid in wild vain effort along the smooth barrel. The trigger caught on some part of Vickers's coat. There was a sudden explosion, a smoke, silence, a staggering reeling thing before his eyes, a heavy fall, and Ance recoiled, seeing on the floor her tall, large form, the face whitening, a quick red stream leaping in jets from the neck and spraying the nail-dented boards of the floor. His eyes opened wide, his jaw fell. Then of a sudden he dropped the weapon, knelt, tore off her white apron, and tried to stanch the merciless flow which soaked it. It was vain. The ball had gone upwards through the brain, cutting a large artery in the neck. He ceased, stood up, and knew that it was useless. As he looked, her lips stirred. Her round white arms twitched. Something like a strange smile convulsed her face, and all was still in the cabin except the click, cluck of the wooden clock on the wall. Of a sudden he became afraid. Before that he had been simply shocked. The change from the noble, amply-modelled woman, all life and rage, who had aroused his worst passions, to the white inert mass on the floor, had at first for him the amazement of a miracle. But now he was afraid. He backed slowly to the door, then, still watching her, stooped to pluck his straw hat from the floor, glanced around, saw no one, and suddenly

ran, like a beast pursued, down the hill and into the woods. After a half-hour he sat down, exhausted, by a brook, and for the first time became capable of thought after his kind. Before this he may be said to have merely felt the emotions of astonishment and sorrow, and at last of pure terror. At length he had come to a sense of personal danger. Looking about him, he became suddenly aware that he had still in his left hand Miriam's apron red with blood. He placed the rolled garment in the brook, covering it with a large stone which he lifted from the bed of the stream. Then he washed his hands and coat with care, and, standing up, followed with his eyes the faint stains in the slow current until they were lost to view. After this he turned and walked slowly until he came to his lonely cabin on the far slope of Laurel Mountain. He entered it, shut the door, and sat down on a rough settle. His lack of imagination spared him some forms of mental distress. The refinements of self-torture he escaped. The extremity of pure fear at times returned, and he groaned aloud, but of the child and helpless blind Philetus he thought but vaguely. He had, however, a shameful sense of having hurt a woman, and yet knew that as far as intention was concerned he would as lief have killed himself. Of that self as a creator of the causes which led to her death he also failed to take cognizance. Withal there was a dreadful confusion about it in his brain, long weakened by drink, so that at times it was all dull and indistinct to him. Simple, brutal, with only a redeeming love of fair play, he had never

been known to use a knife or to take a revenge save in the way of a direct personal contest, and, although feared for his great strength and courage, was on the whole liked as a rough, generous man who used no base advantages. He took a long drink of whiskey and walked about restlessly. It was clear even to his slow mind that flight was vain and likely to result in capture, and what would come after he also understood. Moreover, to fly was to fix suspicion; and how now could any one think of him as guilty? He knew that he must as soon as possible face his fellows, and again and again said to himself that it was just an accident. But then what right had he to be there? He was not so stupid as not to know what sinful temptation took him to his comrade's cabin. Except the habitual pride in his reputation for fair play, which worked for good, he had few possibilities of gentle development save the one which might have come to him from the love of a woman. That she had been in an evil sense unattainable had set her away from him for all possible kindly helpfulness in life. Take, in the arithmetic of being, what we can get from what we want, and the remainder is often that despair which arrests the honest and sets the sensual fool staggering along the road to crime.

The coarse animal, now a little revived by drink, had a wild impulse to go back and see the thing he had loved or craved and killed. But dread for himself, the instinct of self-preservation, was dominant, and increasingly so as the hours went by. Remorse, the torture of the imaginative, he had

not, only fear, sense of shame, of loss, of stupid regret. He drank again, and, going out, took the road to Rollins's camp, where two or three men were arranging sleds and cabin for the winter tree-falling. It was now afternoon, and getting towards dusk. As the shadows lengthened, he began to desire company of man, and moved along more rapidly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On his homeward way, Paul wandered somewhat in search of squirrels, and about noon, beginning to feel hungry, struck across the woods for home and dinner. On his way he came upon Philetus at his work and about to leave for Mrs. Preston's on a like errand.

"Halloo, Phil," said the boy. "I've got eight squirrels. Here's four for Myry." And he laid them by the old man's coat.

"Whar have you bin?" said Philetus.

"Well, I started out with Mr. Riverius to go over to your house with a lot of things he brought mother for your folks, and——"

"Whar's he gone now?" returned the woodman, abruptly, turning his large useless eyes on Paul.

"Oh, he sent me over to camp and took the things himself."

"And he's went thar alone?"

"Yes."

"Consider! Whar's Consider? Do you see him? Ef you see Consider, tell him I've gone home. He'll foller me ef you tell him."

"I don't see him."

"Set me in the ox-road, Paul. I'm that dazed to-day."

Paul took his hand and led him a rod to left, a little puzzled, because, as a rule, Philetus was

strangely competent to find his way. "You've left your hat and coat and the squirrels," said Paul. "I'll get them for you."

"Yes, yes," said Philetus.

When Paul came back, the man had gone. The boy saw his broad shoulders at a distance, and called after him, but got no response. He stood in astonishment. "Well, that is queer," he exclaimed. "I'll take them home." And, so saying, he slung the garment on his arm, put the hat on top of his own, and, shouldering the woodman's axe and his own rifle, went away wondering.

"Philetus has gone home and left his things, mother," he said as he entered the cabin. "I don't know what's wrong with him. He's getting to be very queer." Then he told how Riverius had sent him (Paul) to the camp. "He didn't want to talk, mother. Mostly he likes it. I think he is as queer as Philetus."

"But why did you not go with him, as I told you?"

"How could I? He said it was important to get word to James; and of course I had to go. It didn't make any matter."

"Yes, it did." She seemed to him unreasonable, and she was really troubled in mind. "And Philetus has gone home?"

"Yes; and I was to send Consider after him."

"Send him at once. Tell him to hurry. He is at the well. There, go. Do you hear me? Do as I tell you, at once." Paul was standing before her, thinking all his little world was becoming strange.

However, he did her errand, which she hastened by a few words to Consider. She wrote them large on the small slate he carried, urging him to hurry and that Philetus was ill. Far ahead of him the blind woodman was going swiftly along the road. His unbridled imaginations were away with him on a path of vague fears. The wolves of anger, jealousy, insane suspicion, pursued his blind yet rapid steps. Now and then he paused and touched tree or stump or listened to hear the sound of a brook. He knew the way. Almost his feet knew it; but when in his wild eagerness he ran and struck against a tree, he hesitated, cursing his lost sight. At last, breathless, he came out on his clearing. Oh but to see! He called, "Myry, Myry!" Then the child ran from her play-house and took his hand.

"Where's mother, Phely?" he said.

"Mother and Mr. Riverius they wanted to talk secrets. Phely had to go away."

"How long was he there?"

"Phely don't know. Oh, very long."

"Come," he said, and, as she moved too slowly, he carried her, and, not listening to her incessant prattle, set her down at the door. She ran in before him.

"Myry!" he cried, and followed the little one. "What's the matter? Somethin's wrong."

"Mother's lying down on the floor, and, oh, she's all red—oh, pretty red—all over! Who tore your clothes, mother? Here! here!" she cried, pulling at his hand.

He stooped and touched the still form on the floor, then, in agonized haste, felt face and breast, rose, swayed, and at last fell again on his knees beside her and caught up the poor dead limp form he had loved, and kissed it over and over. "Oh, Christ," he said, "she is dead! My Myry is dead! I cannot see. She cannot see." He lifted her large figure and laid it on the bed, tenderly set out the strong limbs, and closed the eyes, trembling as he touched them. Meanwhile, the child was quiet and awed. At last, as he stood by the bed, staring visionless at the form below him, the child said, "You all red too, on the hands."

"Who's that?" he cried. It was Consider.

"It's me, Phil. It's Consider," said the deaf man, announcing himself with a touch. "What! Myry! Why, she ain't dead! Surely! She's shot! Who done that? Your rifle's on the floor." He leaned over her, fearing to touch her, and keeping his hands behind him. "It's awful, Phil. It's in the neck. She's dead, sure enough. Who done it?"

"Who's been here, Phely?"

"Mr. Riverius, he's been," said the child.

"He's the man," said Philetus. "I knowed it was a-comin'. I knowed somethin' was a-comin'." He seized the deaf man's sleeve and pointed to the door. "Rollins," he said, distinctly, "and the rest," and opened and shut his fingers to show that he wanted all the men to come back with him. Then he took the child in his lap, and waited, sitting silent before her many questions.

Meanwhile, Consider ran down the slope and into the woods. In an hour, as he came near to Rollins's camp, he met Ance Vickers.

"What's up?" said Ance, boldly, seizing his sleeve. The deaf man, as if hearing him, answered, "Myry Richmond's killed. Phil he says Riverius done it." Ance started. "Little Phely she says he were thar. I don't take it as that German done it; I don't. He ain't that sort."

For a moment Ance stood still, while Consider went by to the camp in hot haste. A sense of relief at suspicion being directed away from him was Vickers's first feeling. He would have time to think, and would be easier about meeting the men. Then, too, a grim idea came into his mind that at last his enemy would be humbled. His resentment was somehow intensified by his own mishap, and he did not readily forgive a defeat. That it all might mean something more grave to Riverius he did not stay to consider. His mental horizons were limited. The haughty gentleman would suffer. Ance liked that, and just now that was all. He went on into camp, where all was wild confusion. Mrs. Rollins, who was with her husband, together with Rollins and a half-dozen men, went away at once with Consider. Ance said he would come later, as soon as he had had a bite, or, as Rollins said was better, he might join them at Mrs. Preston's, where they would seek Riverius if he had not already fled. "If he is the man he won't get much time from this crowd," added Rollins; "but what's done's got to be done just, and no hurryin'."

Then he hastened away, leaving Ance to his rather troubled reflections. These were simple if not brief. He knew at once that the public opinion of the camps would be against Riverius. He knew also that in this lawless wilderness retribution was apt to be swift and not over-thoughtful. As to the evidence against the German, he could tell little; but if—if it should be enough to hang him? Ance did not like that. Confession was not in Vickers's mind, but the idea that another should die for an accident he, Ance, had caused was a thing grave enough to one who valued himself on fair play and absence of treachery. He rose at once, and after a half-hour of rapid trot through the woods came to Riverius's cabin. The German as he knocked said, "Come in," and looked up in surprise, adding, "What do you want?" The faint chivalry of the woodman failed him a little at his rather cool reception, and he wished he had not been in such a hurry to act. But Riverius was at present in a sunshiny humor, and saw, too, some sign of anxiety in the red wild visage before him. "Sit down, Ance," he said.

"I came over—I want to speak to you." He was blown from exertion.

"Well, I am here. What is it? Can I help you in any way? If you would only quit the bottle I would be always ready to help you. I was never glad a fellow had been drinking until that night we had our fight. It was lucky for me. You are a brave man, Ance Vickers, and you have no business to drink."

Ance was pleased. A rough word would have stopped him. "I ain't as bad as some folks makes me out, Mr. Ryverus. I wouldn't mind tryin' a fall with you ag'in; but now that ain't my arrand. And ther' ain't no time to lose. Myry Richmond's bin killed this mornin'."

"What! Killed! Myra killed?"

"It's so. It's my notion she's had a accident; but the men say you done it, and little Phely she says you was thar to-day, and Philetus he's awful sot ag'in' you, and I jus' come over to tell you to git out of this, quick. They'll hang you, sure as day."

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Riverius, rising. "This is horrible!"

"Don't you stay to talk. Jus' you git away. Take the dug-out and the river."

Riverius reflected for a moment. "What made you come to warn me?"

"Well, I don't think you done it. It's a accident. You couldn't of done it, noways."

"Thank you," said Riverius. "Thank you. I shall not forget this." And he put out his hand, which Ance took. He felt better. The German could escape, still suspected. He would further counsel him how to avoid pursuit. All the night was before him for flight, and thus Ance would remain free from immediate peril, and, what was worse, of having a man die for his fault. "You'll go quick?" he said. "You 'ain't any time to lose."

"Gott in Himmel! you do not suppose I shall run away?"

"Then you're a dead man. Mind, I tell you."

"I shall not go."

"You must be crazy like, to stay. You don't know Rollins and the rest."

"I shall stay. Thank you all the same."

Ance did not like the outlook. "If them fellers knowed I give you warnin' it 'd be bad fur me."

"You may feel sure that I shall not mention you, no matter what happens. Now get away. If you are seen here you will be suspected."

Ance went out. At the door he turned back. "You'd best think about it."

"I have. Good-day." And Ance, puzzled, went out into the woods, and waited again in awful perplexity.

As to Riverius, he sat down, and, with little material to aid him, thought over the peril about to come. It was simply absurd, incredible. But as for Bessy Preston,—oh, that was the worst of all! He, too, waited.

CHAPTER XIX.

In about half an hour, Riverius saw, at the door he had left open, Rollins, Philetus, and a half-dozen others, all armed and grave, and behind them Ance Vickers. Through the door-way he also saw Mrs. Preston, looking over at the group.

"Come in," he said. "What is it?"

Rollins entered at once. "Myry Richmond's been murdered to-day," he said, "and you are the man that did it."

Riverius rose quietly. He did not see at once that it was his *rôle* to seem surprised, and his coolness served to injure his cause.

"Indeed!" he said. "That is strange. And you mean to say I did it. Come in, men,—and you, Philetus. Now listen. I have nothing to hide. The thing you tell me is terrible, but I shall show you that it is impossible that I could have done it."

"That's what we want," said a man.

"I had no cause to dislike her."

"Guess not," said one at the door.

"I went over to see her to offer Philetus a place with large wages near Pottsville. I have always been good to her and to him. What reason on earth have you to think I—I of all people—would hurt a woman?"

"I've got to talk here," said Philetus. "No, no; I ain't goin' to kill him," he added, as Rollins

put a hand on the rifle the blind man carried more from force of habit than for hope of use.

"This here man's been a-comin' to my house off and on, and my wife that's dead she—— Oh, Lord! what fetched him thar in the night times? Many's the night I've got up and sarched my clearin'; but I 'ain't no eyes, and what was the use? He come when he liked. I don't credit none of that 'bout a place. What did he turn me off fur, and go to talkin' 'bout a place now? It's ag'in' reason."

"I think you know better," said Riverius.

"'Twasn't reason enough to turn me off. 'Bout this murder, I say he done it. I've got thinkin' eyes, ef I 'ain't got seein' eyes. That man killed my Myry. God knows what went on thar. Her clothes was tore. You seed 'em; all of you seed 'em. And my gal she said he sent her out, and Myry she told her not to come in soon. She told her that. Oh, Lord, Lord, forgive her! And didn't Paul Preston tell me as he sent him away too?" A murmur went up from the men.

At this moment Mrs. Preston appeared. In a few words outside Consider had told her all. "Let me pass," she said. "What is all this, Mr. Rollins?"

"It ain't no place for women," said Rollins. "Mr. Ryverus is a good deal more than suspected of having killed Myry Richmond. No one else was there to-day. The child was made to go out and leave them. He sent Paul off on an errand. She says no one else was there."

"It is nonsense," said Mrs. Preston. "She may

have killed herself. Philetus had made her unhappy enough for that or anything."

"Yes, or anything," groaned Philetus.

"Why did Mr. Ryverus go over there?" said Rollins.

"To ask Richmond's wife to talk to him about taking a place on his coal-land near Pottsville."

"Why didn't he speak to Phil?"

She was silent.

"Speak out," said Riverius. "I desire no concealments."

"He hated Mr. Riverius."

"And he had a right to," said the blind man.

"Do you suppose, Mrs. Preston," said Rollins, "any one will believe Ryverus wanted just for nothing to help a man he knowed despised him?"

"Yes," she said; but the men laughed. Then she added, "Mr. Riverius wished to help Mrs. Richmond and her child. He had no personal quarrel with Philetus, and you will do well to hesitate as to this business. Philetus is not, I think, a sane man. His evidence is worthless." Again there was an angry murmur.

"Mrs. Preston," said Riverius, "I beg of you to leave us. I am among men who will see fair play. But first I wish to say that I reached Richmond's cabin about nine, that Paul went with me and left me on the way."

"What for?" said Philetus.

"I sent him to my camp with a message for James."

"Oh!" exclaimed one or two. The deliberate

desire to be alone with Miriam shown in getting both children away seemed clear to them, and the fact that no one else had been there appeared also certain.

"You surely," said Riverius, "will think much before you act rashly. I am alone, a stranger. No man can say I have done evil while among you."

"And I say it," said Philetus.

Riverius went on: "I go to see Mrs. Richmond on an errand of mercy, and wish of course to talk with her alone. On this you lay a charge of murder."

"It might have been an accident," said Ance.

"It wasn't that," said Rollins. "Anyways, it ain't a matter to settle this fashion. I've sent for Pearson and the lower camp. To-morrow morning we'll just go over the whole thing and try this man fair. If he didn't do it, he'll get off; and if he did — well, justice is justice. Here, Mr. Ryverus, you've got to be made safe. Jones, do you and Wilson keep guard round this cabin. Tie his hands, Ance. There, take that snow-shoe lacin'."

Riverius grew white. "Mr. Rollins," he said, "I pledge you my honor I will not try to escape."

"We don't take no man's word in this sort of business. We'll just make sure you don't get away. Come, clear the cabin."

Ance hated it. As he came towards Riverius, the men turned to go.

"Hush," said Ance, behind the prisoner. "I'm fur you. Give me your hands." Riverius quietly obeyed. Rollins walked back and looked at the

German. "Take his rifle, Ance." Strict orders were given as to the guard, the door was closed, and Riverius was left to his reflections. He heard at times the steps of the guards. The insects troubled him. He lay down or stood up, uncomfortable, furious, or in grim wonderment at the absurdity of his situation. He had been in battles, he had faced wild creatures and wilder men in many lands, and was by nature and by habit brave. The danger did not greatly trouble him. In no way could he bring it strongly home to himself that here outside were men who believed that he, John, Baron Riverius, had killed a peasant woman. He thought of the old castle, the great hall, the windows with their heraldic blazonry, the arms upon the walls, each with its familiar story, and then of his own study and the resolute features of his father looking from the canvas above the fire. He glanced about him, laughed outright, and said aloud, "Der Teufel! the things that bite! Halloo, there!" he cried. At his second call Jones entered.

"What do you want?" he said, roughly.

"Want? I don't want to die of midges and mosquitoes."

"Oh, that's all? Well, here's Paul Preston's fetched your supper. Git him to build a smudge."

Paul came in, silent, and in dreadful trouble. It was now quite dark.

"I'm awful sorry, Mr. Riverius," said the lad. "I've brought your supper. Oh, they've tied your hands. Let me cut it. Oh, I'd kill them!" And he burst into tears

"Don't cry," said Riverius. "Just brush off these mosquitoes and build me a smudge. The pot's in the hearth. No use to cut the cords; best not. And give me the milk to drink. So; now that is all I want; but tell your mother to come and see me to-night. She must manage it. Thank you, old fellow. Now don't cry. We'll pull through somehow."

The scene without would not have reassured him. By degrees threescore rough lumbermen had been over to Richmond's and seen the still corpse, and heard the tale in divers versions, and come away to Mrs. Preston's to sit around the fires in her clearing or to relieve guard or discuss the murder. Only Ance and Consider were at all friendly to the accused, and the blind wretched old Philetus wandered from group to group, relating his hallucinations as realities to men devoid of judgment, until Rollins and Pearson saw that it was becoming hard to control or influence the wild mob about them. Pearson was desirous to send the prisoner to Smethport for trial; but this was not the way of the woods, and Rollins knew, with much doubt in his mind as he discussed the matter, that in one fashion or another the fate of Riverius would be settled at early morn. He meant at least that he should be fairly dealt with.

The evening wore away, and about nine Mrs. Preston sent for Rollins. She pointed to a seat. "Mr. Rollins," she said, "you are going to get into trouble."

"How?"

"Mr. Riverius is a German nobleman. He is rich, well known, and powerful, and has friends. Just reflect how absurd it all is. The want of motive,—the chance that she did it herself."

"Oh, that couldn't be. There had been a struggle."

"Well, the chance that another did it. These woods are full of bad men."

"That's so; but who else could have done it?"

"Will you help me and him?"

He was disturbed. He hated Riverius, but it was one thing to hate, and another to send a man possibly innocent to death.

"It would be as much as my life's worth."

"And what will it be worth if—if—oh, if you hang an honest gentleman and learn in a week who really did this awful thing?"

"I'm not everybody," he said, and began to wish he had been less urgent.

"Well, get him away. You can do it. I will give you a thousand dollars,—all my land,—anything."

"It's no use," he said. "I haven't got the power."

"Then take care of yourself in future," she said, rising.

He looked at her sharply and went out.

"She's a good bit of a man, that woman is," he said.

It was a little after this when Mrs. Preston received her message from Paul. She rose at once and went out to find Rollins. The men looked up

curious as she passed among them. She found Rollins talking earnestly to some of his lumbermen.

"I won't have it," he said, as she came up. "It ain't too sure, and he's got to have a fair trial, and Pearson's men aren't all here. You wait till they come." He stepped forward to meet Mrs. Preston.

"I want to see Mr. Riverius," she said.

"I don't know about that," he returned.

"Do you think any one will stop me? You're a poor set of men. What can a woman do that you need fear?"

"Oh, let her go," cried one of the men.

"Thank you. There is one man here with a soul."

"Come, then," said Rollins, who never had the same opinion for two minutes.

"I want a half-hour."

"All right." And he preceded her, said a word to the guard, opened the door, let her in, and, closing it, waited without.

CHAPTER XX.

"It is I," she said,—"Bessy," trying to see him, as she entered the dark room.

"I am over here," he said, quietly, rising from the bed. "My wrists are tied. No doubt Paul told you. Sit down by me." She did so, her hands on her lap.

"You are a good and brave woman. I have little hope of escape. Don't cry." She was sobbing like a child.

"Listen. Do you know how I love you?"

"Yes."

"I was a fool,—a weak fool. I hesitated. Education and traditions are cruel bonds. I am ashamed to speak of it, but I must."

"No, no; I understand. I always understood. You love me. That is enough."

"I want to hear you say I am forgiven."

She bent over and kissed his cheek, he feeling her tears wet his face and instinctively straining a moment to release his hands.

"My God!" he groaned, "but life is sweet, and I might have spared you all this if I had but been less a fool."

"Don't! don't! I cannot bear that. There is a fate in it. I—I sent you to Miriam's, and I might have known better. Oh, yes, I might have known better."

He was calmed by her despair. "Do not let us hurt each other this way," he said. "Try to attend to what I say. It is most needful. You can do me no better service. Try, dear."

She put her arm behind him and caught the bound hands, whose touch as she felt the cords seemed to drain life of power to suffer. He waited, and, as the dulled sound of oath and laugh and the increasing clamorous talk without reached them, she sat up stiffly, instinctively governing body and shaken mind at once.

"Now go on. I can listen."

Even in this bitter hour he had pleasure in the way in which his pride in her was justified.

"Take off my ring."

She did as he directed. He wore it on his thumb, after the German way which had much surprised poor Miriam.

"Keep it," he said.

"Yes."

"In my portfolio are papers, deeds, and addresses. They will tell you all you will need to know. Keep whatever in my trunk you want. Give Paul my rifle and books. You must write to Fritz. He will have the old place. Tell him everything, not soon, but when you feel able. That is all, I think." She remained silent, waiting to know what else he had to say. He went on, "I did want to take you to my home. I was so proud of you. I had written of my hope to a friend. Fritz will send you a miniature. Keep it. Keep it where I can see you. And pray for me, Bessy.

Ah, with you I should have been better, wiser. Don't stay here to-morrow. Go away to-night."

"I shall be by you, if—if you die," she said. "Do not fear for me."

"If?" he said, tranquilly. "Ah, my child, there is no 'if' here. Listen." The tumult without was growing. "Have no delusion about this. Another woman than you I would cheat with hope. It is best not,—best to face it, to feel sure that I am a lost man to this world."

She rose as he spoke. "I cannot bear it," she said. "I cannot make it seem possible. God will help us."

"Yes, in his way, not ours. I want you to go now. Before you go, I want to say to you that there is no measure of earthly love I do not give you. Take that with you. A day will come when it will be pleasant to recall. Kiss me, and don't stay. I want you to go."

"Why must I? I cannot."

"I at least do not deceive myself. I know these men. My time may be brief. I want to be alone with my thoughts. With you here I cannot think. All life and all its joys reel round me at your touch. I must get away from these, from time. You understand. Kiss me."

She threw herself on his neck and clung to him, kissing him amidst a rain of tears.

"Do you want to weaken me, Bessy?"

She rose up at once.

"Good-by. It will not, shall not be. God will help us."

"Do not deceive yourself," he said, again, "and do not bear useless malice. Learn to live again. You owe something to Paul. These men are as beasts, who know not what they are doing."

"I shall neither forget nor forgive."

"Bessy!"

"It is so. I shall go mad. Oh, men, men!" And she fled violently, casting the door open and going haughtily through the groups and past the fires.

"Mein Gott!" he said, "that was hard."

Meanwhile, another was almost as anxious as she. Ance went about among the lumbermen and heard their talk. Whiskey was plenty and passions were high. Perhaps even more clearly than Rollins he saw the nearness of the danger. A word, a moment, would bring death. As he passed a fire, he paused, hearing Rollins warn the men to be careful, as the whole country was like tinder, no rain having fallen for two months. Rollins moved off to repeat his caution, and a man called to Ance, "Come and have a drink."

"I don't want none."

"That's queer. Anyhow, set down and help rig this here noose. It'll be wanted to-morrow, or sooner, maybe."

"Rig it for yourself," he replied. "You'll need it some day."

Suddenly he saw a long mass of gray moss pendent from the limbs of a dead pine. Dimly seen in the wood by the leaping firelight, it took the shape of a man's body suspended. "That's awful!" he

groaned. "I've got to do it some way. O Lord, git me off this thing, and I'll never drink no more." It was the nearest approach to a prayer that had passed his lips for many a year.

The suggestion of fire left in his brain a dull hope. He stood still a moment, and then went over to Mrs. Preston's through the men.

CHAPTER XXI.

VICKERS approached the cabin cautiously from the back door. He knocked and waited. Then a voice said, "Come in." He entered. Mrs. Preston was sitting in troubled thought.

"Who is that?"

"Me,—Ance Vickers." And he shut the door.

"What do you want?"

"Kin you trust a man?"

"Yes," she said, alertly.

"You're his friend."

"I should have been his wife."

"He didn't do that thing; and, as sure as day, there'll be murder done before sun-up."

"I know it."

"Look here. Are you grit to do a big thing?"

"Go on, and hurry. I can do anything."

"Then do you and Paul take some matches and go into the woods and git apart a bit and light three or four birches. Git well back, a good five hundred yards. Then run for the river, and keep under the bank, and back to your clearin', and come right up, so as no one don't see you."

"A thousand dollars if you save him."

"I don't want it. It ain't that. I know he never done it. But run, run like mad, when you've lit the birches. The whole country 'ill go. They'd kill 'most any one they ketched, man or woman."

"Good!" she said.

"Mind, it's your doin', and there won't be a stick from here to Smith's tract that won't go."

"Let it burn," she said. "But as to Mr. Riverius, what shall you do?"

"You fire them birches with this wind a-blowin', and I'll look arter him. And there'll be resks for some."

"What! These men? Thank God! I trust you, Ance."

"Then in half an hour."

She called Paul from the outside and calmly told him. He listened in his usual patient way. Then he said, "I see. It will work. Ance will do it." And together they slipped out and passed into the woods.

It was hot, and a strong gale was roaring in the pines and blowing on their backs as they went. Meanwhile, Ance found Rollins.

"I'll just look after that knot a bit. Couldn't I leave it off for the night? The flies is awful."

"Oh, do as you like," said Rollins. Ready to rush into danger, he cooled off visibly as the risks multiplied.

On his way Vickers met the blind Philetus "Ance," he said, "did you see Phely?"

"Yes; she's with Consider."

"She 'ain't no mother now, and I've got to quit drink. Don't you never go to make me drink ag'in."

"I won't, Phil."

"Did you see my Myry?"

"No," said Ance, faintly.

"They said she was that white, and her face like a angel's. You'd like to come over and see her 'fore she's put in the ground?"

"Yes. Oh, Lord!" groaned Ance, as he moved away. For the first time, the awfulness of the calamity to others oppressed him. The motherless child, the helpless blind man, troubled him. His own safety being assured, he was open to understand and measurably pity what he now saw,—the consequences to Phil, who admired his strength and courage, and to the child, who liked him as she liked all masculine beings. Of late, Phil had been physically failing, as the camps knew well; and now what would become of Phely and of him? Want, Ance could appreciate. He had felt it. That needed no conjuring fancy to bring it sharply before his mind. Serious beliefs the man had not of any definiteness. These need for sustentation in such natures frequent reminders and example and usage. Some vague God there was for him, no doubt, but more the memory of a child's faith than a definite belief. Certainly all his reflections now were personally directed and limited to the lower levels of consequence. And yet, by degrees, his awkward, rusty mental and moral machinery, fed by time and chance, was competently grinding out torments, and was also pinching into capacities for human use faculties for feeling long benumbed by drink and disuse. These mills of God which grind so slowly grind out at last the bread of a larger, better life.

Ance wound in and out among the men, troubled by Philetus, who clung to him, held his sleeve, and showed an increasing sense of dependence. Once Rollins called him back and urged him to take care the prisoner did not get away. Ance grinned. "He's got two hearts, like an Injun," he muttered; "don't know what he wants." At last he was free to enter the German's cabin, but he had lost ten precious minutes. At the door he turned and looked about him. Several camp-fires blazed on the clearing,—none over fifty yards away. No leave had been asked. Around them lay some of the men, drinking, and in wild clamorous discussion. Others moved to and fro. Beyond was Mrs. Preston's, and the woods were all around, but far more open towards the river, where trees had been felled to let in the air. Riverius's cabin was set back in the forest, and well shaded. Around it two men walked with loaded rifles. For the first time since the death of Miriam, Ance had a dull sense of pleasure. Danger, conflict, chance for action, strung to normal tension the slack nerves of the man, hitherto hustled about by brute emotions and without power or hope to resist. The idea of material difficulty at once helped him. A dim sense of courted peril as expiatory was in his blunted consciousness, and, with a renewed sense of efficiency, he smiled as he said to the sentries,—

"I'm to fix him for the night. I'll be a half-hour, maybe; then I'm to take your place, Jones."

"He won't want no bed to-morrow night," said Jones, "the way the men's talkin'."

"That's so," said Ance. "Wouldn't bet he'd see mornin', ef I had my way." Then he went in and closed the door.

"What time is it?" said Riverius through the dark, smoky atmosphere, thick from the smouldering smudge.

"Nigh on to eleven, I guess."

"Oh, it's Vickers, is it not?"

"Yes, it's me." And he drew near.

"What's wanted now? Anything new, Ance?"

"Look here, Mr. Ryverus. Air you minded to stay and resk it? You was this mornin'. You'd 'a' bin wiser ef you'd 'a' took to my notion and left."

"I shall stay. Indeed, what choice is left me?"

"You needn't."

"What! Why should I want to go? I am innocent."

"Talk low," said Ance. "You 'ain't got one chance in a hundred. I've come to help you. Mrs. Preston she says go. That's what she says. There's men now out there gittin' a rope ready."

The German shuddered. He thought of those of his race who had died in battle or by the axe, and to perish by a brute's death amidst a howling drunken mob,—"Ah!"

"I will do as you say. What risk will you run? That troubles me, Ance."

"All right. I don't run no resk. We kin do it. Now you listen. Let's untie your hands. It 'll supple 'em a bit. You may want 'em."

"Thank you. Himmel! what it is to be free again! What next?" He wished much to ask

Ance why he was so eager to help him, but he thought this could wait, and Ance was keenly anxious to act.

"Look here. In ten minutes I've got to take Jones's place. When I go out, tie this deer-thong across the door-way, 'bout a foot high. When I call, 'Fire! fire!' then you git ready. Wilson's a dead shot. I'll holler to him to run in and look arter you. He'll trip over the thong, sure. Then you jump over him, take to the woods, and make for the river. I'll shoot over you. Go right into the river and let the water take you down. The dug-out's resky. They'd maybe see it. Kin you swim?"

"I? Of course."

"Well, them rapids don't trifle with a man; but it's the only way. Are you game fur it?"

"Yes."

"Take your boots off 'fore you wade in. They're onhandy in the water. Drop 'em when you're well out. Try to make in at Laurel Mountain. Go right up to my cabin and hide. Guess no one won't look fur you thar."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"What fire is it you expect? Who is helping you?"

"That'll keep. 'Ain't no time now. And look sharp. I'll jine you soon's I kin git off." And, so saying, he went out.

Riverius, moving with caution, at once laid aside his coat, put a pistol in his belt, secured all the gold

he had about his person, arranged the cord across the door-way, and waited anxiously a few feet from the entrance. The time seemed endless. "Ach!" he exclaimed. A sudden, dulled murmur came to him from without through the gloom. The noise of drunken revel ceased abruptly. Then there were oaths, cries of "Fire! fire!" Suddenly Ance also shouted, "Fire! fire!" and, throwing the door wide open, cried, "Run in, Wilson, and stay by him. Shoot him if he runs. Quick!"

Wilson obeyed, made a hasty rush into the cabin, caught on the deer-thong, and fell headlong with a curse. Riverius leaped over him as a deer leaps, and before the guard could regain his rifle was off and away into the woods on his right. A single shot passed high above him as Ance fired. He made for the river direct and with rash indifference to exposure. As he crossed an open space, he was seen in the growing light, the night itself being none too dark, and the ping, ping of two rifle-balls perilously close did not lessen his speed. He tore off his boots and plunged in, waded some thirty feet, struck wild water, and in a moment was fighting for life in the white rush of the rapids. Then he let fall his boots. For two long minutes he was rolled over, tumbled about, hustled against rocks. Once his head struck, and for a moment he was dazed, and then a vast surge lifted him with strong tenderness over a great boulder, and at once he was in swift but quiet water. He shook the moisture from his face and hair and passed a hand over his eyes to clear his sight. He was flying with dan-

gerous speed down the black hurry of the stream. He looked about him, and saw only leaping jets of spray, black wood-masses, and over all, behind him and to left, a splendor of ruddy light on high and here and there quick spurts of flame and mounting sparks. Then ahead he caught sight of white water, and struck out for the mid-current. With a vast effort he won the wild crest, sure that to fail was death. The last rapid had been child's play to this. It was brief. There was one fierce shoot, with a fall of fifteen feet. It was like a drop through the air. He shot under, and came up breathless and exhausted. The rest was easy. He kept his head straight, and gradually worked shoreward. He seemed to be in a narrow vale of black water, the shores close in on him, the sky as it were down almost upon him. He was clear-headed enough to wonder at the delusion. Then he saw the slope of Laurel Mountain, and the sharp line of the lumber-slide where it crossed a gorge. Suddenly he struck bottom. He had been needlessly swimming in two feet of water. At last, tired out and bruised, he rolled himself on shore and sat down to rest. The glow behind him was now magnificent. A vast glory of rich ruby light flared upward, and, cloud-caught, flooded all the sky. He wondered. Some one had fired the woods. Two rainless months, the leaves sapless, the floor of pine-needles, the very earth dry, the wind raging furiously through the trees overhead. The woods would burn to the river, and quicker to the eastward. There was ruin to many, risk to not a few.

Enormous loss, centuries of growth gone, to save a single life. Who had done it? Even in his still present peril the vastness of the sacrifice excited his imagination. At last, thoughtful, alert and rested, he struggled up the mountain, hurting his feet and plunging through the tangle of the vigorous laurels. After an hour, he won the farther spur, and found himself near the top, and at the door of Vickers's cabin. He cast himself down on the ground and felt safe for the first time. The spur he was on rose nearly nine hundred feet above the river, and back of it, broken by abrupt ravines, the country gradually fell away, a sloping table-land. The main mountain dropped more precipitously to the Alleghany, and parallel to its course was cleft by the deep rocky gorges which had caused Riverius to suggest a slide as the readiest means of getting logs to the water.

Now and then, glancing out at the ominous and growing light of the burning woods, the German sat in thought. The wind was blowing more and more fiercely. This, he reflected, would probably keep the fire away from Mrs. Preston's clearing, which covered some two hundred acres, and where great precautions had been taken against the spread of fire. She and Paul were safe at least for the time; but it was quite possible that, as the sparks mounted, upper currents might scatter them far and wide and mysteriously light at a distance new and destructive fires. As for himself, he had little fear. There would be nobody to trouble him so long as this remorseless blaze endangered camps, cattle, oxen,

wood-sleds, and the rough homes of men. But he was flying from the suspicion of murder. Life, happy life, would be out of the question until that matter was settled and the murderer known. Imagination poisoned for him all the sweet future. It is at times a cruel scourge to the refined and gentle. He seemed to himself to be involved personally in the train of consequences that had led to Miriam's death. Had he but waited a day longer, it would not have been. Had he less desired to help her, no suspicion could have touched him. How soon after he left did it occur? How could a man have done so brutal a deed? Could any set of contingencies ever lead him to do such an act? Suddenly he shivered. It was in part from the growing chill in the night air at that height, and in part because he had a sudden realization of the fact that a man who had not done a murder might come to believe he had done it. He recoiled as from a precipice, leaped to his feet, and began to walk to and fro. He had the fortunate intellectual training which enables a man to drive back to their caves the wild beasts of morbid emotion and to keep them penned. The exercise helped him. At last he went into the cabin, found a blanket, and lay down on the floor, dragging over him a worn buffalo-robe and some dead boughs meant for kindling. He could not sleep, but the warming body helped the mind to wholesomeness, and he lay and thought of Bessy Preston.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Paul and his mother, avoiding the camp-fires, slipped aside and went into the woods, the riotous noise around the fires was at its worst, and oaths and loud words and broken songs were in the pleasant night air, and were blown to her ear by the growing wind which pursued her steps. "Come, Paul," she said. "Could God have made such beasts?"

The boy was singularly resolute. He was all of the mother, and more, and none of the weaker father. He understood her well, and had a boy's indifference to the consequences of what they were about to do.

At last they paused some five hundred yards or more from the clearing. "Now, mother," he said. "If Ance is to get him off, we must make sure. Look here. We'll set long bits of birch sloped this way against a dozen trees. Then we can light the farthest from the river and touch off each as we go down the slope. You take the four nearest the river,—any ones. They are all big birches and pretty ragged. The bit of bark will take a little time to burn up to the trunk. Now, mother. Be quick, and keep me in sight. The boat is right below, if they follow us; but they won't. Now." He leaned down and very coolly adjusted the slips of bark. "Ready?" he said.

"Yes," she replied.

There was the sputter and yellow flame of matches struck. In a few seconds a dozen little innocent spires of rich, crimson flame were climbing up the bark. He was at her side, and looked back. "By George!" he cried. In an instant a half-dozen trees were ablaze. The loose ragged bark of the birch, always inflammable, was now as dry as if baked. The beautiful wild flame rose instantly with a furious howl to the top of the tree, a thing to be remembered when once seen and heard. "Run!" he said, for she stood as if paralyzed with terror by the demon they had set free. The forest was like day with an unearthly red, and the shadows of trees flashed out black as jet across the dry woodland floor. As they fled, behind them the roar of the flame as it leaped and caught and ruined each great birch was repeated over and over. He pulled her down the steep bank. Then he half cocked his rifle, which he had kept ready, and waited. The sound of drunken orgy suddenly ceased to load the air with curses. Loud cries were heard, and three rifle-shots, as her grip on Paul's arm tightened, and she prayed as women rarely pray.

"He's off, sure," said Paul. "Come, let's get back; and be careful, mother, and don't take hold of me. Mind, I shall shoot if any one says a word to you."

"Don't, if you can help it," she said.

As they walked up the stream, unknown to them the kindly water bore past them in the darkness

what she loved best on earth. Opposite their cabin they went up from the bank.

"Ask no questions, Paul."

"Of course," he said.

The camp-fires were deserted. In vain hope the men, under Rollins's lead, had gone into the woods to fight the fire. Bessy and Paul gained the house readily, and stood at the door.

"Let me go and see if he's off," he said.

"Not a step. Wait. It is in God's hands now. Put away that rifle."

He did so, and came back. The roar from the burning wood no man could hear without some sense of fear. The wind leaped on it as with a living thing's delight, and drove the flame in great flaring masses from tree to tree. Acres were ablaze. The pines beyond the birch grove tossed, writhed, and blazed, exuding resinous sap to feed the fire. Beneath, the dry pine-needles carried it far and wide with a speed past belief. There was something like the energy of life in the rage with which the fire did its work, now rising in cruel splendor high in heaven, now, as if mysteriously eager, darting in long blasts of ruin through the open spaces. Over all rose, black and awful, a growing, rolling shaft of dense smoke, and, spreading out above in a black dome, rosy with reflections from beneath and starred with sparks and gusts of flame which seemed to burn in mid-air, spread and spread wider and more wide.

"It is awful, my son," she said.

"We did it well, mother. I must know about Mr. Riverius."

"Wait."

Presently her patient courage had its reward. Two men came out of the woods and passed quickly before them.

"This is awful business, Mrs. Preston. There won't be a tree from here to Damson's Ferry. You're pretty safe, unless the wind turns."

"Must 'a' bin sot afire," said the other man.

"That's what I say," said Wilson. "It's bin done o' purpose."

"Where is Mr. Riverius?" she said. She could bear the suspense no longer.

"You won't be sorry to know he got away."

"Indeed!"

"I missed him, that's a fact. It was a trick, the whole thing. I 'ain't bin back yet to look, but there was somethin' tripped me at the door, and I didn't wait to see. We came for axes. Come, Joe. This fire'll bust up Rollins." And they hastened away towards the burning forest.

"George!" said the boy, "Rollins will suffer for to-day's work; and I'm not sorry, either."

"Hush, Paul. Run up to his cabin and see. Bring any papers you can find, and his note-books on the table. Stop, I'll come too."

They ran across the deserted open space, and entered, Paul first. He fell over the deer-thong. "Look out," he said. "Mother, that was clever." And he explained it to her as she stood.

"Get it off. Hide it," she said. He cut it away

and put it in his pocket as she came in, and, striking a match, lit a candle. At once they gathered up papers, note-books, and a portfolio which was locked. "Take them, Paul." And he sped away. Then she stood alone. It was the first time she had been by herself in the cabin. "God bless and keep you!" she prayed, and went out.

A half-hour later, Rollins came back with Ance and some other men, and, black with smoke, entered her dwelling. He sat down, exhausted, while the men stood about.

"What is it you want?" said Bessy.

"Where were you when this fire started, Mrs. Preston?"

"In the house," she said, calmly.

"And this boy?"

"In the house also."

"I'd hang him up a bit and find out," said a man, the foreman of Rollins's gang.

"What! a boy like that ther?" exclaimed Ance. "Not ef I know it." There was a murmur of dissent.

"You are fools," said Mrs. Preston. "Do you think I want to see my woods afire?"

"I don't know," returned Rollins. "For a turn of a cent, I'd do it. I'd know someway. I'm a ruined man. Thirty years of work clean gone. Hang him? I'd hang you if I was sure."

"Coward!" she said.

"Oh, this won't do, Rollins!" cried a man, coming forward.

"And that's what I say," added Ance.

Opinion was against him, and Rollins doggedly went out.

"Guess Ryverus he got off," said Ance, boldly.

"And there's no time to look for him, nuther," said another.

Meanwhile, Rollins began to give orders as to his distant camp and oxen, and sent men away up the river to do what they could. In an hour the cabin was left silent, and Becky, Paul, and his mother sat watching the growth of the blaze which the two latter had started. Ance accepted a mission from Rollins, but soon turned aside, struck for the river, and in an hour or so was at his own cabin.

When the men had gone, Becky persuaded Mrs. Preston to lie down for the few hours left of the night, promising to keep awake and be watchful. Paul declared that he would keep her company, but before long sunk down on the boards of the little piazza which sheltered the front of the cabin, and was soon lost in sleep. Becky covered him with a blanket, tucked another under his head, and sat staring at the enormous dome of rosy gold above the still growing fire. There was less wind, and the smoke and flame went up straight in air, not yet so far away that Becky could not hear the dull roar and catch at times the explosive sound of some suddenly-heated tree split by the swift boiling of its sap.

The woman had been but a spectator at the play, and was capable only of such human interests as habit gives, appetites command, or mere animal

curiosity imparts. Just now, she was a little disturbed. The stillness threatened a change of wind. All her life she had lived in the woods, and knew well their dangers. The fire had left a hundred yards unburned between the place at which it started and the clearing. This belt was now slowly yielding to the flames, which, however, might possibly do no harm, as the open space was broad and two weeks before had been harrowed over to destroy the dry grass and prepare for risk, since in all that land no man had passed a day since June without fear or thought of this dreaded enemy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

About six o'clock Becky awakened Paul. He started up.

"What is it?" he said.

"You'd best go and look round in the woods and see if ther' ain't no fire goin' to start 'mong the pines. The wind's 'most stopped, and them sparks is a-droppin'. It might rain 'fore night. Don't make no noise. Yer mother's fell asleep. I was in to see."

"I'll go," he said.

He made a complete and distant circuit in the woods, and at the river climbed a lightning-scathed pine. A hundred feet in air he sat astride of a limb and looked in growing wonder. Widening from the place at which it set out, the fire had spread to the river, and inland for miles. Far away it still raged under mounting, heaving masses of smoke, which now and then burst into gigantic gusts of fire high in air as the gases the products of imperfect combustion were sufficiently heated from below. The river-bed was full of smoke, and at times to left he could see the sun, an umber globe, and sometimes as the smoke veil on the river swirled or lifted it cast on the water the same sombre tint. The boy recognized in the vastness of the catastrophe and in the unusualness of the lights and colors something which made him serious.

He wondered where Riverius was now, and at last descended. Perhaps he had taken the dug-out. He would look.

As he approached the shore, he paused. The pirogue was pulled up, and in it asleep lay Philetus, his head propped on a stiff bit of bark set against the bow. On his breast, also asleep, and wrapped in his blanket, was the little Ophelia. Paul touched him, and at last shook him. He was sleeping profoundly. He sat up. "What's that?" he said.

"It is I, Paul Preston. How could you sleep in this smoke? It's awful." The child was coughing in her slumber.

"That's so," returned Philetus. "Got to get out of this."

Phely aroused as he lifted her. "Phely's hungry," she said. "Phely wants mother."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Philetus.

"Come," said Paul. "My mother will get her breakfast. Come along, Phil."

"You're a boy, and 'ain't no reason. Your mother and me ain't friends no more. She give it to me hot yesterday. I'm goin' home."

"You can't do it, Phil. It isn't safe alone. If the wind changes, there won't be a tree alive down to the Ohio. Wait for Consider. He said he'd be back; and Phely—the child's half starved."

"I'll go," he answered, and silently followed Paul through the thickening smoke, which was less oppressive as they rose above the stream.

About twenty feet from the cabin, Philetus sat

down on a stump. "Take her in," he said, "and feed the maid. I'll bide here."

"Come, Phely," said Paul. He did not question Phil's decision, and meant merely to report it to his mother and leave it to her. Ophelia was easily comforted by Becky's supplies, and Mrs. Preston, after hearing from Paul, went out at once to Philetus.

She was happy over Riverius's escape, and awed and even troubled at the thing she had done, now that the need for action had passed by. It was as if she had wakened by a touch an earthquake or some such enormous physical catastrophe beyond the common power of mortal summons. Yesterday night it had seemed not only needful, and therefore right, but also a just and delightful vengeance. It hurt her, too, that she had lied to Rollins and before Paul. She was her gentle self to-day, humble, thankful, and free from passion.

"Come in and eat, Philetus," she said.

"Not bite or sup in that cabin. You 'ain't bin no friend of mine. You're his friend that murdered my Miriam. You sot them woods ablaze. You done it. You raised that hell-fire that's a-roarin' yonder. May it find him, find him, and burn his body and scorch his soul!"

Bessy recoiled, terrified. "You are foolish. I, a woman,—I set my own woods afire? Nonsense!"

"Will you go to say you didn't do it?" She could not, would not lie again, and was glad that he was unable to see her face. "You ain't used to lyin'. You done it well to Rollins. I heerd about it.

You can't lie to me. The Lord's on my side. He's a-listenin'. When you're a-castin' up accounts with him, he says there's a murderer loose, there's a dead woman a-lyin' white and still, there's a little helpless thing sayin' 'Mother!' like to break a man's heart."

"Philetus, it is useless to talk to you. If you say that I set that wood afire, you know what may come of it. Leave me Ophelia, and go home with Consider. I hear that Mrs. Rollins went there. When all is settled, come back, and we will talk about the child. I want to help her and you."

He stood silent a moment. "I'm that dazed, I don't know. I'm a-seein' red all the while,—red like blood. Where's that man Ryverus?"

"I do not know."

"Keep the child. He won't hurt her, I guess."

"You are worn out, Philetus. You want food."

"Not bite or sup in that cabin."

"Well, I'll send it out to you."

"Not in nothin' he's touched."

"No."

"Then I'll take it. It is willed that we should eat."

She left the distraught old man, and sent him his breakfast by Becky. Then he waited patiently till Consider came, and went away with him to the desolated cabin and the dead wife.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When Ance entered his cabin, he looked around, and, seeing no one, began to think that Riverius had been lost in the river. The German kept silent, to make sure in the darkness before he spoke that it was certainly Vickers. The latter stood at the door and lifted a glass to see how much whiskey he poured out. As he did so, Riverius was sure, and said, aloud, "Don't do that." Ance dropped flask and corn-cob stopper, and turned.

"You skeered me." He was trembling.

Riverius rose. "You must not drink. We shall both want clear heads. How is it at Mrs. Preston's?"

"Oh, all right; but them woods is burnin' like the devil was a-blowin' 'em."

"Who set them afire? You did not tell me."

"Mrs. Preston and Paul. They done it well, too."

"Mrs. Preston!" murmured Riverius. Again he owed her a life, but now no sense of overpowering obligation disturbed him. "Ah! she is worth a dozen of me," he thought. "Is it burning still?"

"Burnin'! You bet; and it'll burn for a week, unless the rain comes. Mostly them big fires fetches rain. Anyway, it'll keep the men a-flyin' round and git us a chance to leave. We'd best lie

by here two or three days and then take to the river."

"Could you carry a message to Mrs. Preston to-morrow?"

"I might."

"And now about that murder, Ance,—if it was one. I have heard so little. I want to understand it all, and fully. I suppose you can tell me."

They were seated, the one on a rough settle, the other, Ance, on the bunk. The excitement of the escape, the fire, and the need for action had in a measure helped Vickers to put away sight and present memory of the great fair woman he had left in a pool of blood on the floor. Now a word had brought her back again. And yet speak he must.

"'Twas an accident. That's what I say. Nobody murdered her."

"But they told me there had been a struggle, that her dress was torn, her apron gone. How could it have been an accident?"

"Well, there's no knowin'." He thought with gathering horror of the red-stained apron. If there came a flood, and it should wash away the stone and the thing should be found! Then he reflected that it could tell nothing new.

"Where was she shot?"

"Oh, I don't know. In the neck." He spoke impatiently, and was in fact in torment.

"Did she die at once?"

"Oh, Lord! how do I know? I wasn't there. Don't let's talk about it."

"But I must know. I must talk. It is needful. I shall never rest until I learn who did it. Why cannot you see that I am forever a hunted, ruined man until I can put my hand on the brute who killed her?"

"It won't be no use. It wasn't you, that's sure."

Riverius reflected that it was strange how this coarse, dull-witted man should be almost alone and positive in this belief.

"I was told that the poor little child found her first. How pitiful that seems! Rollins told me most of it. He said the child thought the blood was paint. How horrible! And to call her mother and get no answer!"

Ance sat in the darkness writhing and twisting hands wet with the sweat of torture. "I don't want to talk about it, Mr. Ryverus. I liked that woman."

"No one can like to talk of it; but for me to think it over and learn all I can is merely a reasonable effort to discover the true murderer. I shall have no peace till I find him. I wish I could see the place again. A little thinking it over there would possibly be of use. What will become of poor old half-crazy Philetus? I think that blind man standing in darkness by the dead body and the child is the most pitiful——"

"If you don't stop," said Ance, "by heaven I'll kill you!" And he bounded to his feet.

A sudden wild light of intelligent insight smote Riverius as with a rude physical buffet. He too arose.

"*You* killed that woman, Ance."

"Yes, I done it."

The darkness was profound, and in it the two men stood silent a moment.

"I am sorry for you, Ance. You could not have meant to do it."

"She p'inted the rifle at me, and I tried to take it away. It went off,—caught somethin'. Went off!—my God! it went off! Didn't I say it wer' an accident?"

Riverius guessed the rest. He was mercifully silent. As to Ance, he had dropped again on the bed. The confession wrung from him by the rack on which the German's successive comments stretched him was simply an indescribable relief. He had told it. Another knew it. He had been able to explain it, and this man, this haughty gentleman, was sorry for him, pitied him. There is inexplicable mystery in such solace, and it is very real. It left Ance disturbed by a clearer sense of the ruin he had brought to Philetus. At last he said, "What will you do now?"

"You must get away, Ance. I know you have told me the truth. Now I see why you wanted to help me."

"Lord, sir, you don't think I'd 'a' bin that mean to let 'em hang you for what I didn't go to do? I ain't that bad."

"I am sure you are not." Nevertheless, it is to be doubted if at utmost need Ance would have done other than obey the brute instinct of self-preservation. "Once out of this country, you must

find some way to clear me. I will think it over. I believe you have told me the truth; and if you have not, I must leave you to settle that with God. Now I must try to sleep a bit."

"All right, sir. I'll go out, and keep watch."

Then Riverius lay down in the bunk, and at least rested; sleep he could not. Before Ance's outburst, the German had begun to have some vague suspicion of the truth. For a moment he had expected a life-and-death struggle with the man beside him, but instantly this idea was dispelled, and he saw clearly that the confession had left him in a measure less wretched. He himself was now forced to seek and keep the company of the slayer, to make sure that in the end the truth should be made apparent. It seemed to Riverius a strange fate. For suppose that Ance had lied,—and the business had been bad enough,—here was he, a gentleman, aiding the flight of a murderer! Nor was it easy to see how, without a free statement by Ance, Riverius could clear his own good name.

Despite the agony Riverius had inflicted on Vickers, and the perilous confession wrung from him, the woodman did not for a moment fear that the German would betray him. This was characteristic of Ance, that he looked for fair play. He did not ask for any pledge, but early next morning went quietly away on his errand to Mrs. Preston. Not having even a pencil, Riverius had been forced to send only a verbal message.

By Vickers's advice he shut and secured the

cabin from within, and waited impatiently for his return. The day seemed of dismal length. He looked at his watch. It recorded only the hour of his plunge into the rapids. He opened it and set it in the dulled sunlit window to dry, and glanced at it now and then to see if it would revive and go to work again. Ance had warned him not to smoke. That was hard. He watched a spider and rescued a fly,—why, he could not have said. The spider should live, he reflected, and, if not constructed to eat turnips, what right had he, Riverius, to stop him in the mid-joy of successful fly-stabbing? When a mosquito fell next to the spider, the German looked on unmoved, remembering that things of the kind destroyed had of late made life a little harder for him. Next he considered as to whether this justified his ceasing to act as an intervening providence as against spiders and in the interest of flies and biting things. Comparisons between these deaths and the tragedy which had involved him arose in his mind, and he reflected upon all the vast tyrannical machinery of nature implacably grinding out agony. There was time indeed for philosophic thought such as Riverius well loved, but he laughed when over and over amidst some prospering well-linked success in binding cause and consequence the sweet notes of an old love-song rang in joyful riot through his brain. Then of a sudden Bessy was there before him in almost natural distinctness, with that pride which made her gentle, and such supple grace of timid womanhood as led him to reflect with wonder

at the courage she had shown. Riverius had, like some proud men, hidden deep down in his heart the over-sensitive sentiment of a girl. He did not want this sweet company here in the brute woodman's cabin. He would have taken it with him out into the woods, if it had not been that he desired to run no risks for Vickers. At last he fell asleep, tired, and yet not unhappy.

It was ten o'clock when Ance reached Mrs. Preston's. Presently he saw Paul, and said, cautiously, "Who's about, Paul?"

"No one but mother, and Becky out in the cornfield. Rollins hasn't come back, nor the men, except Consider, and he has taken Phil over home. They are going to bury Miriam out under the pines down near the brook. Mother wanted to go, but I told her she had better not." Paul was much impressed just now with his own importance.

"She didn't go?"

"No. Isn't it awful, Ance? You ought to have seen poor old Phil. He's just like—well, just like a bird with a broken wing. It's awful, Ance! He is so helpless, you know; and if Consider was to go off anywhere, I don't know what he would do. He was asking for you. He says you and Con are his only friends."

"He said that!"

"Yes. Come in."

Ance followed him. The bearded red face was haggard and strangely white. The eyes were watchful and restless. He looked about and now and then behind him. At the door he met Ophelia.

"How you do, Ance?" she said. "Where's my father? Where's mother?"

"At home," he answered, hoarsely.

"Take me home. Phely wants to see her. Phely is very good to-day. Ride Phely on your shoulder."

Ance, like many rough men, had a liking for children; they made some mysterious appeal to him; and at Richmond's house, when present with Philetus, he had been fond of playing with the child, and could too well remember how often Miriam had watched them, displeased at his presence. An overwhelming sense of the moral loneliness which crime inflicts came upon him. He liked company, as men do who lack interior resources, and yet felt that now it was to be feared. He longed to talk of his misery, and dreaded opportunity. A horrible desire to tell the child arose in his mind. He made no reply to her appeals, but went by her in haste, she clinging to his jacket and calling, "Ance, Ance," as she danced beside him. "When will Ance come to see mother again?"

"Take her away, Paul," said the man. "Where is your mother? I 'ain't got no time to lose."

Paul secured the attention of the little one as his mother appeared from her own room, and went out with her at a sign from Mrs. Preston.

"Sit down, Ance," she said. "Is there news yet?"

"He is in my cabin, safe as long as the fire lasts. Rollins and the rest's got the'r hands full. Further away it gits the better fur him. 'Bout Saturday

ther' ain't no moon to speak on, and then I'll git him down the river. Two days' run'll clear us. He said I was to tell you it was all right."

"Why did he not write?"

"He hadn't nothin' to write with."

"He will have to hide to-day and until day after to-morrow night."

"If the men git round, he'll have to lay by longer. I ain't goin' to run no resk." Then he paused. "Did Paul cut away that air deer-thong?"

"Yes."

"Then he done me a service. Wilson he come back and looked. You ought to 'a' heerd him tellin' the men how Ryverus tripped him up." And Ance grinned and was suddenly surprised at his own mirth.

"I owe you a great debt," she said, rising and seeking his hand. He took it eagerly. "A debt I shall never forget,—never. If ever I can help you, I will do it. Do you want money?"

"No; Mr. Ryverus he's got lots, he says."

"One thing more. Don't drink, Ance. I can't help thinking it was some drunken lumberman did that awful thing. Think how he must feel. I should think it would punish him enough only to see poor old Phil and that child."

"Ef he was drunk it wouldn't be the same as ef he was sober."

"No; but every wise man ought to know that there is murder and every other crime in the whiskey-jug. For God's sake, don't drink any more. Let this thing warn you. Philetus likes

you, and, so far, you have only used his liking to make him drink."

"That's so. I don't deny it none."

"And did he not save your life once? I have heard so."

"Yes."

"Promise me."

"I'll never touch liquor ag'in, so help me God!"

"And come over to-morrow, if you can."

"Yes, ma'am, ef I kin." He went out, and by and by came back. "You've got to look sharp for 'drop-fires,' Mrs. Preston. Them sparks goes up, and comes down a man don't know where. It's bin a awful fire. The old burned tracks stayed it to the easterd; but you can't tell."

"How far will it burn, Ance?"

"Lord knows." She stood thoughtful as he went out. In the air he paused, took off his cap, looked up, and, as if registering an oath, said, "I've touched my last liquor. Hadn't bin for liquor, it mightn't of bin." Then he walked over to Ophelia, picked her up, kissed her, and set her down.

"Mother says Phely mustn't kiss you. Mother says you're bad."

"I was," he said, and walked away, Paul mean while looking after him, puzzled and curious.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ance did not return. To avoid suspicion, he found it needful to see Rollins and ask for some work. Meanwhile, Mrs. Preston became more and more anxious. Now and then a lumberman came by, and she learned to her comfort that Riverius had not been heard from, and that the fire had been checked by old burnt districts and the river. An immense belt of ruin, however, lay to the northeast, and oxen, sleds, and cabins had gone. As yet a heavy pall of smoke, now high in air, hung over the whole land, and all things looked strange in the sallow sunlight which filtered through it. As the dry weather persisted, there was still peril and alarm, and every one knew that at any moment the fire might renew its ravage. Philetus was still absent, and the child's pretty and incessant talk disturbed and annoyed Mrs. Preston. At last, on the third day, Paul proposed to take the little one to pick berries. His mother gladly assented.

"Where will you go?" she said.

"Oh, down to Laurel Mountain."

"This side only."

"Yes; they're plenty in the lower gorge."

"Well, don't go far, and on no account on the mountain."

She had told Paul nothing of Riverius's place of hiding, thinking it best to keep it to herself. He

only knew that their friend had escaped. The charge against him made but slight impression on Paul, and his mother, refusing to discuss it, had scornfully put the matter aside. She had at once said, as she had done to Ance, that the death of Miriam lay at the door of some one of the many villains who found in the woods a shelter and a means of living out of reach of the civilization which had been too restrictive for their wants or passions.

Riverius was much on Paul's mind, and now he went away with Ophelia thoughtful of his friend and gladly relieving his mother of the child, whose talk of the dead Miriam more and more disturbed Mrs. Preston as her gathering anxiety for Riverius increased. She, too, understood very well the doubtful position he now held. She reasoned on it, however, with less pain than it gave him, and was more concerned as to his present safety.

As Paul and Ophelia wandered along, the boy gave himself up at last to her pretty, caressingly persistent ways, and ceased to think of the German, the murder, or the fire. On the lower slopes the huckleberries were still abundant. After a while they climbed a little, and, as usual at this season, found the berries still more plenty as they rose. At last Paul sat down and leaned back against a mossy old beech-trunk. It was very comfortable, and the fair Ophelia had quite exhausted him by her quest for berries and her craving for attention. He watched her awhile as she went to and fro, pleased with the tints of the sumach, and

gathering the leaves of reddening gum-trees. Now and then the smoke, which everywhere since the fire began was at times unpleasantly thick, became somewhat more dense. The afternoon had worn away, and now, although it was but six o'clock, the day seemed near its close. Looking up, Paul saw that the sky was overcast, and noted here and there in the woods the trees swaying in little gusts of wind which appeared to blow up the river, and which, as he lay and thought, seemed to him to explain the increase of the smokiness, now very obvious. It would rain, perhaps, and that was all—or at least the last thing—he could afterwards recall. For three nights he had been up late and risen early. Twice he had been aroused by Becky or his mother and sent out to see if the "drop-fires" had by chance fallen anywhere near them. His head fell. He half roused himself, saw Phely near by, fell off again, and slept as only a tired boy can sleep. When at last he awakened, he leaped to his feet in alarm. The air was more full of smoke. It seemed to be moving towards him in irregular currents. Overhead the sky was darkening fast with the gathering clouds of a summer thunderstorm. Now and then sudden puffs of wind shook the lower trees about him, and overhead the tall trees swayed, roaring in the strong upper currents of the coming storm. Ophelia was gone. He looked about him, searching the vistas in vain. He called aloud, but got no answer. He ran hither and thither, sadly perplexed, and full of self-reproaches. At last, in despair, he climbed a dead

tree and called again and again. Then he heard, or thought he heard, a faint cry from the steep slope above. Meanwhile, the increasing smoke which came over the hill and through the gorges alarmed him. There must have been a new fire awakened by the aid of the storm, and if so it would surely sweep through the deep ravines full of birches and pines which on either side of the mountain lay nearly parallel with the river. He was down in a moment and away up the hill. As he went, swirls of smoke came around the mountain on both sides. He pushed on, increasingly anxious. As he climbed upward he saw of a sudden a dull glare of light on his left and far away. He called anew, and, getting no answer, ran on, tearing through the dense laurels. He was now on the granite summit of a lower knob of the mountain, which still rose some two hundred feet above him. He could dimly see at times through the thickening smoke the line of the lumber-slide. He shouted till he was hoarse, and set out down the side of the intervening gorge. Suddenly a blast of smoke nearly blinded him, and he paused. It was hot, and the sparks were falling thick about him, whilst the wind of the coming tempest roared in the pines above his head. He saw that they came directly over the mountain-top. At last, worn out, he stopped, and called once more. As he stood, another fierce gust went over him, and he saw between him and the river a half-dozen birch-trees flaming upwards with the fierce howl he knew so well. At times the smoke, heaving like sea-waves,

revealed again and again these plumes of fire, all of them, as he guessed, quite near the river. A moment after, he reeled, blinded, coughing and gasping in the acrid fumes. This time it was a blast from around the landward side of the hill. He fell on his face for breathing-space, knowing well that the heated smoke would lie above him. For the time he was safe, and more easy. A foot or more above his head the air was almost clear. He drew long breaths, and gathered himself for decisive action. To go on was to die, unless he could win the bold summit before the fire swept around the mountain, and then, even there, he felt that he would not be able to decide what to do, and was well aware that he had no time to lose. To wait was impossible; and Ophelia! Meanwhile, as he lay, he heard a fierce rush through the laurels, and caught a glimpse of a flying buck. A rabbit jumped aside from his lifted head, a huge rattlesnake fled swiftly by, passing under his arm, eager only to escape, careless of its human foe. As Paul rose, fierce lightning flashed overhead, instantly followed by the echoing roll of thunder, and the storm-wind rushing over the rounded mountain-top drew the fire into the traversing gorges, along which it swept roaring as if through vast chimneys. The heat was every instant greater, and over him the dusking heavens were reddening fast. He still hesitated. His inborn hatred of defeat was backed by a terrible sense of his failure to care for the child. Something struck his arm. It was a scorched, half-choked squirrel. Tamed by the fire,

the wild little savage clung to his arm. The next moment a man shot by him in swift flight down the hill. Paul called, turning as he did so, "Halloo!" The man stopped just below him, out of sight in the dense vapors.

"Who is it? Where are you?"

"It's Riverius," cried Paul. "I,—I!" he cried. "It's Paul! I'll come!" And he bounded down the rocks, slipping, and at last rolled over at the feet of the German, who instantly pulled him up.

"Come," he said. "Quick, at once. Run. We have not a minute to lose. Mein Gott, what a time!" Paul tried to speak, but choked and could only obey. And now to either side the woods a quarter of a mile away were ablaze, and over them, here and there, the dry pine-tops were aflame, and sparks and lighted twigs falling around them found new fuel in the dry moss and half-baked pine-needles. At last, breathless, they won the lower levels and got among the deciduous maples. The smoke was thinner, the trees less numerous. They caught glad chests-full of clearer air.

Riverius paused. "Where is your mother?"

Paul pointed. He could not yet speak.

"At home. We must reach her. She must cross the river at once. Every stick on this side will go. Come."

"Stop! stop!" the boy managed to cry out.

"Well, quick."

"I was with Phely. I fell asleep. She got away. I lost her. Oh, Mr. Riverius, it was my fault. I wish I was dead!"

"Dead! Himmel! death cures no mistakes. Come." And he strode away. "We must think of your mother. Can you run?"

They bounded over the snake fence, ran across the clearing, and then met Becky.

"Mrs. Preston she's down at the dug-out," she cried. "She left me to tell Paul. She was afeerd for Paul." The woman looked curiously at Riverius. "I wouldn't go over the river," she said. "Rollins has crossed, and I see Consider and Phil come down in a dug-out. Guess they'd a notion to save the wood-shoot. Anyways, they're there." And she pointed across the Alleghany.

"Mein gute Becky," said Riverius, coolly, "to be hanged is unpleasant; to be burned alive worse. I propose neither. Mind, you have not seen me."

"I ain't no fool, Mr. Ryverus."

"Good!"

They had talked as they hastened towards the Alleghany. The circuit of the mountain a half-mile away to left was a belt of growing flame, least towards the river, where the trees were mostly maples and cherry. At the boat stood Mrs. Preston.

"Where is Ophelia?" she said.

Paul pointed to the mountain and burst into tears.

"Don't talk now," said Riverius. "The boy behaved like a man,—like a brave man.—Come, take over your mother and Becky, Paul. Say you are going back for these blankets; you forgot them. Leave them here, Becky. Now off with you, Paul."

As he spoke, the dug-out shot out athwart the

stream. The smoke rolling up the river hid them from view. Caught by the downward rush of the rapids, it was shot upward and rolled curling over on the waves,—a strange sight for one more at ease to note it. "Wet something," he called after them. "Cover your mouths." They obeyed him, and were gone across and down the stream, guided by Paul's agile figure and quick-falling pole. Riverius threw himself on the edge and drew long breaths.

In an hour or less, Paul came back. "Now up stream," said Riverius, leaping into the boat and seizing a pole. "I will leave you two miles above, at Split Rock. To-night about ten fetch me the dug-out, and I will risk a run down stream alone." He was all energy, quiet and self-possessed. As they landed, he said, "Paul, I have not had a moment to tell you that Ance is on the mountain. I thought he had followed me. He was at my side when we saw we had to leave. Then I heard him say something, and missed him. He is too clever a woodman to be caught, and I think he will get out. However, it is as God wills."

"And Phely?"

"Ah, who can say? Don't cry, my boy. Trouble comes to us all. Look well after your mother. And if the river seems too thick with smoke, don't return for me; don't venture. I will find my way down the banks. Good-by, and God keep and help you!"

Paul silently wrung his hand, and the boat darted away into the rolling smoke.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When Ance turned back from their downward flight, it was with a strange wild joy in his heart. He had heard, with his well-trained sense, a human cry in the gorge. Calling to Riverius to go on, he turned to the left and bounded down the craggy slope with a word or two more which escaped his companion. Then he paused. The smoke was stifling, and far worse than on the granite summit. Inland, where the country fell away from the mountain, there were for a long distance only low bushes, and the fire was swiftly sweeping around them. The cry was heard again.

"It's Phely! It's Phely, for sure!" Seeing little, he dashed madly down the slope, gasping for breath and beating the laurels aside as he went. Ah! He had her in his arms, a scared, sobbing, half-choked little creature. Turning, the man fled in haste up the rocks. On all sides there was fire. Again he ran up the main mountain-side, and at last came out on the bare top at the head of the slide. He knew at once that he was trapped, and that soon the fierce wind, which now and then dropped a deluge of sparks around, and the flame and smoke from the southwest, would make life impossible. He set the child down, and for an instant stood still in perplexity. The next moment he turned and stooped to see more clearly. A dozen axes lay

under the log-shoot. He drove one deep into the bottom logs of the slide. Then with furious energy he dragged a piece of squared log, cut to use in mending the slide, up on the short inclined plane at its head. He pushed it down until it stayed against the axe. He lifted a second timber and slid it down beside it. No man on the broad Alleghany but Ance could have done the thing, nor he, perhaps, under other circumstances. At the upper ends of the logs were the auger-holes bored to receive the spikes meant to bind them fast when used. He remembered the day he had bored them, —the day before he had last seen Miriam. He could not find the spikes, owing to the blinding gusts of smoke, but there were axe-helves at his feet, and two he drove, blow on blow, into the auger-holes. Then he ran back to a lumber-pile, groped about, and found some ox-harness. He cut loose the hide traces, stumbled back again, reeling and half blinded, and, shutting his eyes, skilfully fastened the traces firmly about the axe-helves so as to bind the two logs together. Next he took off his coat, seized the weeping half-strangled child, and sat down on the two logs he had thus united. For a moment he looked about him. There was no fire visibly nearer on three sides than two hundred yards, but as to this he could only guess or see dimly as the swirling smoke permitted. Certainly the bushy, stone-laden summit was clear as yet. What lay between him and the river he could not tell, but above the rolling storm-driven smoke-clouds there was an ominous red

light. So far he had acted with remarkable decisiveness. The means were familiar; the bold action he contemplated was in accord with the fearlessness of his character. As he sat on the logs, dealing with the slight hesitation which now disturbed his purpose, the gray smoke was dense about him. His eyes watered. He could see nothing beyond a dozen feet, except the wavering glare overhead and now and then the lines of orange-red the lightning cast athwart the sky. A few large drops of rain fell. Should he risk the venture and stay? Had he been alone, this would have been his choice. He did not underestimate the peril of the other choice. He sat leaning forward, grasping the handle of the axe which alone held fast the logs beneath him. A fiercer rush of wind over the hill-top brought more rain, but, striking the southwestern slope, sent the marching blaze of distorted spirals of crimson and yellow far up into the sky. He bent down and saw the white face of the child, one cheek a fiery red, the mouth convulsed. "Too late!" he cried, and quickly wrapped his coat fold on fold over the child's face. Then, with one broad hand pressing the garment firmly against Phely's face, with the other he loosened the staying axe with a quick motion and cast it from him. The timbers did not move. He lifted himself and pushed at the raised side of the slide. They started. How slow, he thought. Through the smoke which let nothing be seen ten feet away the great squared logs slid, gathering impetus as they went. Open-eyed, half

blind, Ance stared ahead. Quick and quicker they shot through the sombre cloud-darkened twilight. In a few seconds the speed was awful. The trees here and there below them in the gorges were ablaze, the heat intense. As he felt the influence of the single curve dangerously sway him, the man fell back flat and caught at the side of the timber he was lying on. His hand was crushed, but they were not thrown out. Then there was a blinding rush, swift as an eagle's swoop. He clasped both hands over the child's mouth and nose, gave one fierce scream of torture as they flashed through a blazing belt of pine and birch, and instantly after, with garments on fire, shot off the end of the slide, and, hurled headlong, fell twenty feet into deep water. He rose to the top and lifted the child above the surface. Was it dead? Would it live? He knew not. The cool water eased him, and there was little or no smoke on the level of the deep, comparatively quiet pool. He could dimly see lights on the shore. It was all he could do to make the land. He paused on the edge as he staggered out. Ah! the child was struggling, alive, crying wildly. Then he tried to shout for help, but could make only a hoarse, hollow sound. Why was he so weak? Gasping for breath, he stumbled along, climbed the bank, saw a light, and ran pitching to right and left like one drunk. Suddenly he was aware of a camp-fire, voices, Philetus, Rollins, Paul. He saw no more, but fell headlong at their feet, as they started up, the child, little the worse for the ordeal, rolling from his grasp.

"My God! he's saved it!" said Mrs. Preston, as she lifted Phely.

"He is burnt," said Paul, as Rollins pushed him aside and knelt down by Ance to examine him.

Paul ran to Philetus. "She's saved,—saved!" cried the boy. "Oh, thank God, Philetus, she's saved! Mother, bring her here."

The old man stood still. "Where be the maid?" he said.

"Here," returned Mrs. Preston.

He took Phely in his arms, the child still dazed and crying, as he covered her face with kisses.

"Take her, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Preston. "Who saved her? Who fetched her out?"

"Ance," she replied.

"Heaven ain't good enough for that man. Take me to him," putting out his hand. Consider understood him. "This way, Phil," he said, and led him to Ance, who was lying near the fire, groaning, and trying to speak. Philetus knelt down.

"Here, take some whiskey," said Rollins, lifting Vickers's head. He swallowed a mouthful, and gave a shrill cry of pain, thrusting the cup away.

"He's burned in'ardly," said Rollins. "Get some water. Lord! and his face, too." The water he took with effort.

"I'm done for," he moaned, hoarsely, opening his eyes and groping about with his sound hand. "Air that you, Phil?"

"It's me, Ance."

"Where's Ryverus?"

"What's that he says?" cried Rollins.

"He wants Ryverus," returned Philetus. "God, he knows. He's a-sayin' somethin'."

"Ryverus! Fetch Ryverus! Fetch him afore I die."

"He isn't here," said Rollins, kneeling beside him, and greatly puzzled.

"Then Phil—Phil—— Where's Phil? Oh, my God, my throat!" He spoke louder, writhing in anguish. Phil bent over him, and the hurt man drew him closer, an arm under his neck.

"I done it, Phil. 'Twasn't him. I didn't go to. That's why I got him off. Under the stone, —under the stone in the brook by the blazed hickory,—her apron. O Lord, forgive me. You jus' curse me, Phil, and let me die."

"He done it. 'Twasn't Ryverus," said Philetus, raising his clear, sightless eyes, while speechless amazement fell for an instant upon the listening group.

"Phil! Phil!" said Ance. The blind man bent down. "You won't curse me? I giv' you the child."

"You didn't go to hurt her. I ain't no harder nor Christ, Ance." And he took the hand of the dying man, who lay gasping, but said no more.

Mrs. Preston moved over to Rollins. "Are you satisfied?"

"Yes."

"Then send and get Mr. Riverius. Paul knows."

"Come, Paul, I'll go myself," cried Rollins. "Come." And he hurried to the boat.

Those who were left tried to help the man at

their feet, but in vain. The red, scorched face moved now and then, contorted by pain which even the anæsthesia of growing suffocation could not wholly relieve.

His breath came and went, and at times appeared to have ceased forever; after each long interval it came again quicker and shorter.

Elizabeth Preston sat beside him, pitiful, without power to aid the man who had sinned, suffered, and was paying the death price for the life of the child he had saved. Philetus leaned against a tree, self-absorbed and motionless. His little Ophelia, wet and scared into silence, lay at his feet, wrapped in a blanket, and away from the view of torment none knew how to lessen. Over them all hung a gray pall of smoke, now thick, now thin. The flaring campfire lit this strange scene, where was no sound save the crackling of burning logs, the dull roar of the rapids, and now and then a groan wrung out by torture such as no man can bear in soundless endurance. Once the dying man raised himself on his elbows and murmured hoarsely:

"Fetch Ryverus. Where is he?"

At last the noise of clinking poles came up from the smoke-hidden stream. The group opened as Riverius, advancing with rapid steps, knelt down on the sod beside Ance.

"Do you know me, Ance?"

A smile went over the red face on which the German gazed.

"Yes, you're — you're Ryverus."

"Water, quick! water," said Riverius. He moistened the hot, black lips.

"It is I, Ance. What is it I can do for you?"

Twice in the effort to speak Ance failed. Riverius bent lower to catch what he was trying to say.

"What is it, Ance?"

"I want to say I done it. I didn't go to do it. Christ! I told 'em. They know."

"Yes, yes, I too know. We all know. What else is there?"

"I'd of liked to wrastle a fall with you."

Riverius sat mute, holding the scorched hand. Ance drew a long breath. Those who looked on watched to see his strong chest rise again. A minute passed. Riverius rose.

"He is dead," he said. "God rest his soul!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A YEAR and three months had gone by when Johan Riverius and his wife stood in a terraced garden overlooking vine-clad hillsides and the half-seen windings of a little Saxon river.

Elizabeth Preston had found in the German gentleman the true companion of a life to be satisfied with nothing else than the best honesties of head and heart. Happiness and prosperity had enriched the woman with a riper form, and that serenity of face without which beauty is impossible. So thought the man at her side.

"Ah!" he said, "there is Paul on his pony. He will ride well in time. There is a good soldier in that boy. Some day my old regiment will have him."

"No, no," she said. "His career will be at home, not here. I shall harden my heart and bid him go when the time comes."

"Ah, well," returned Riverius, "the day is not yet, and to harden thy heart when it comes — perhaps. What of mine? I love the boy well."

The woman smiled. "I shall have my way. I can make reason hammer my heart hard enough if there be need. When the time comes, Johan, you will make it easy. I sometimes think I am too indulgent with him nowadays, but love and happiness play tricks with one's moral nature." She stood still, of a sudden thoughtful.

"Ah, Bess, Bess, I know that look! Now again you are thinking that once in your life you failed of truth."

"Yes; it does not trouble me now, but it does come back to my memory often, like a ghost I do not fear, but cannot get rid of."

"Would you do it again?"

"Yes, a thousand times."

"Then that is enough; and to comfort you, all the casuists are on the side of that good, stout lie. Let the past bury its dead sins. The graveyard for thy wicked memories need not be large."

"But, Johan—"

"No, no," he urged, smiling. "We will talk of more pleasant things."

"But I must talk. There are things from which escape is not easy. Over and over you have bid me cease when I have sorrowed at the thought of the vast ruin I made to save you. I am grieved, but I do not repent. I dream about it; it *will* come back."

"*Himmel!* to be haunted this way by all one's past sins! I have news for you that should lay all thy ghosts. I have waited, but to-day I can with freedom speak. I had to wait, and now we will have to be economical for two or three years."

"Why, Johan? But that matters little. Economy does not alarm me. What is it? Do not keep me waiting. I am—I am a little sensitive just now. Small things disturb me."

He turned and for a moment considered her anxiously. "What is it, my dear?" She looked to be in perfect health.

"Oh, nothing."

"Good! I have paid Rollins all, and more than all, the fire cost him. I have left you in debt to no man. Consider Kinsman is in charge of the new mill, with Rollins to oversee my affairs. Poor old Philetus Richmond is cared for in an asylum — a hopeless case; and little Ophelia the good German sisters at Lilitz will educate. Are you satisfied?"

"Oh, Johan! And I must have troubled you. This was what I wanted."

He smiled. "And what interest am I to have on all this money which goes to settle your debts?"

"This," she said, and whispered in his ear, flushing as she told her mother-secret.

"Only this was wanting," he said. "Thank God!" And he kissed her.

THE END.

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